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OR,
The Mystery of Room 21.

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AUTHOR OF "BILL BRAVO," "BUCKSKIN DETECTIVE," "TEXAS TRUMP," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERY OF ROOM 21.

DICK DERRINGER at thirty-nine, was known as one of the best detectives in the great city of New York, and the fame he had acquired, was a source of constant pleasure to him.

It had been his fortune to ferret out some of the most secret criminals of New York, and whenever there was an especially hard case, it was by common consent turned over to Dick, with the belief that he would make short work of it.

"ROOM 21—HERE WE ARE!" SUDDENLY EXCLAIMED DICK DERRINGER. "WE SHALL NOW SEE THE MYSTERY WHICH IS TO BAFFLE MY SKILL, BOY."

One night, a few months ago, Dick Derringer was toasting his shins in his cosy office on lower Broadway, when the door opened without the ceremony of a rap, and a boy came in.

"Business must be slack!" exclaimed the detective's visitor, who was a well-built, shrewd-looking lad of seventeen, with eyes equally as keen as those that shone in the young detective's head. "When a man-hunter finds time to toast his shins in New York, the world must be getting better at a dizzy rate."

"What have you struck, Phil?" asked Dick, looking at the boy who was warming his hands at the grate, for the night was cold, and great flakes were rapidly whitening the streets and roofs of the city. "Give me something to do, and see me leave this chair and freeze the very shins I am toasting now."

"I guess I can do that," and the boy's hand disappeared beneath his coat. "I haven't the slightest idea of what I've brought you, Dick, but it strikes me that I've got work of some kind on hand."

The detective stretched out his hand for the piece of paper that came from beneath the boy's coat while he finished, and the next moment a sealed envelope was in his possession.

"Where did you get this?" he asked, looking at the boy.

"On the street."

"From whom?"

"That's what I don't know."

"A mystery, eh?" laughed the detective, breaking the seal.

"It has that look," was the reply. "I was crossing Grand street, at the corner of Mott, when a man caught my arm and asked me if I didn't know Dick Derringer. I told him I did. 'Come into the store,' he said, and in I went. There he went to the desk and wrote the letter I've just handed you. He had a false beard, that man had, and what I noticed more than that, a marked hand. I'd know it among all the hands in New York. But what does the letter say, Dick?"

The detective had apparently forgotten the letter, for while the boy talked he held it in an absent-minded manner and appeared deeply interested in the brief narrative.

"Oh, yes—the letter! We must see what it reveals," he suddenly exclaimed, and he tore the envelope open and shook out a piece of paper upon the table at his elbow.

The boy known as Phil Flash over more than one-half of the city leaned forward with a light exclamation.

"Maybe the man with the marked hand is an old friend of yours, Dick."

Derringer said nothing in reply, but unfolded the letter, which gave promise of brevity, and spread it out before him. Phil, the boy, drew back out of respect, and eyed the detective closely.

"Hello! what is this?" suddenly exclaimed the man-hunter. "We'll share this letter in common, Phil. Look here!"

With eyes brimful of eagerness, the boy leaned over the detective's shoulder and read the message he had received in the store. To his astonishment it said:

"RICHARD DERRINGER, Esq:—

"DEAR SIR:—As you have the name of being the best detective in New York, I would like to have you try your hand on the mystery to be found in room 21, of No. — Mott street. I am free to say, my dear Richard, that it will prove a match for your shrewdness. Now, sir, sail in! MYSTERY."

When he had finished the letter Phil Flash looked up and found the detective regarding him.

"Well, what do you think, Phil?" laughed Derringer.

"It's a cool game, and the man who handed me that letter is a player in it. Why, that number isn't three squares from where I got that letter."

"Hardly two," said the detective.

"You are going to investigate?"

"I certainly am."

Dick Derringer evidently took stock in the strange letter, for he got up and began to put on an overcoat.

"We'll work this case together," he went on addressing the boy. "That letter is a challenge, and I always accept challenges of that kind."

Five minutes later the little office occupied by the detective was empty and the two were on the street amid the white flakes that still came down. A cold wind blew up Broadway and reddened the cheeks and noses of those compelled to be out. The detective's young companion had no overcoat, but his form was well knit and strong, and the youth was fighting the cold with a good show of success.

It was a good distance to the place designated in the mysterious letter; but with the assistance of the horse cars he and Phil Flash were soon set down almost in front of the identical building.

"Room 21, third floor," repeated the boy looking up at the brick house that bore the number mentioned in the letter. "That old trap looks as if it might hold a dozen mysteries. It would make a good man-trap, too, Dick—"

"Which it may be," finished the Broadway spotter. "Did it ever strike you, Phil, that our letter may be some rascal's decoy?"

"Not till just now."

"Well, decoy or not, I propose to see the interior of room 21, third floor. Come!"

Richard Derringer started toward the door of the dingy brick and jerked the door-knob with more impatience than he usually exhibited. Phil Flash was at his heels.

A moment's silence followed the last sounds of the bell, and then the door was cautiously opened by a woman who seemed averse to showing her face.

"Good-evening, madam," saluted Dick, pushing into the hall. "I am on the hunt of a furnished room for this young friend of mine, and I've been recommended to this house. Please show us your best rooms."

"Sorry, but we are full at present," was the answer.

"Oh, no! a house like this is never full!" laughed the detective. "Come, my dear woman. Rates are no object. The young man prefers a room on the third floor. Aha! we'll go up."

"There's only one room up there that would suit the boy," said the woman. "It still contains the goods of the person who locked it up several days ago, and went away. It is room twenty-one."

"On the third floor?"

"Yes."

"You have the key?"

"I have one key."

"That is the room we want to see. If it suits us, madam, we will pay you double price for it, and every dollar in advance, too. If you don't want to climb the stairs, give me the key and we'll investigate."

"You won't disturb anything in the room?" asked the woman, feeling in her pocket.

"Why should we?" was the answer, which was not a promise that nothing should be touched.

This seemed to satisfy the portress of the house, for it produced a little brass key which the detective took with much eagerness.

He went up the steps, followed closely by the boy whose every sense was keenly on the alert; but nothing retarded their ascent to the third landing which was revealed by a gas jet that burned dimly at the head of the steps.

A strange silence filled the upper story of the boarding-house although the hour was not late. It could not be possible that all the occupants of that floor had already retired.

"Room 21—here we are!" suddenly exclaimed Dick Derringer, halting before a door that contained the number sought. "We shall now see the mystery which is to baffle my skill, boy."

The key which the detective inserted in the lock turned readily, and the door was pushed open. A faint odor of musk pervaded the room which was dark, and Phil Flash stood on the threshold while the detective lit a match.

"I wonder what we are to see here!" ejaculated the boy. "I haven't tackled a genuine mystery for some time. I want something to wear the edges off o' this dullness. Maybe I'll find it here. Hello!"

By this time the match in the detective's hand had blazed up, and the boy saw a bureau the drawers of which stood open and had apparently been ransacked.

"This is only a poverty-stricken robbery—nothing more!" exclaimed Phil Flash, after a moment's look.

"It is more than that," answered Richard Derringer, who had stepped toward the bed that occupied the corner furthest from the bureau.

"What is it, then?" cried the boy.

"Murder!"

As the Broadway detective finished he lighted a little lamp with the stump of his match and held it over the bed.

"Murder it is!" exclaimed Phil, leaning forward while his eyes seemed about to dart from his head. "Heavens! what a beautiful woman!"

Well might the detective's young companion make use of words like these.

On the bed and outside of the cover lay the figure of a woman who was still young and the

possessor of a classically molded face. One glance was enough to tell that she was dead, for the staring eyes and the white cheeks told the story of death to the man and boy who looked on.

Dick Derringer held the lamp above the woman for several minutes without speaking.

"I have seen this woman somewhere, but not this year nor last," he said, at length.

"Nor in this house, Dick?"

"Of course not in this house. She was better dressed when I saw her," was the reply. "Well, here is our mystery sure enough, Phil. The man who sent me the letter knew what he was writing about when he talked of a mystery in Room 21. Ah! here is the woman's hand. See how shapely it is, Phil. This person was a woman of quality."

"That is the right hand," said the boy; "look at the left."

"For what?"

"For her rings."

"Ah! how shrewd you are, Phil!" laughed the detective. "Well, here is the other hand. See—Heavens! Look, boy—look!"

The lamplight fell upon the member that had been taken from the bed, and the two friends saw that the ring finger had been deftly amputated from the hand.

Not a ring was to be seen.

"The mystery deepens," said Phil.

"But we'll get to the bottom of it," was the firm reply, "or my name isn't Dick Derringer!"

CHAPTER II.

LITTLE FLASH TAKES A HAND.

MEANWHILE, in the room below on the first floor which she was wont to occupy, the portress and proprietress of the boarding-house awaited the return of Richard Derringer and Phil, the boy.

To her they stayed long merely inspecting a single room, but at last there was a sound of footsteps on the stairs, and Madam Motts went to the door.

"Well, how do you like the room?" she asked, at sight of the detective.

"I don't like the tenant," answered Dick, with a peculiar smile.

"But she's gone, sir—went off four days ago."

"I beg your pardon, woman. We found her up-stairs."

"Impossible!" she cried.

"You can go up and see for yourself. Your lodger is dead!"

Madam Motts clutched a chair for support, all color left her face, and for a moment she seemed at the portals of a swoon.

"Dead? Heavens! my boarder dead?"

"Dead as a door-nail," asserted the boy; "and what is more, somebody helped her out of the world."

"I cannot believe this! The reputation of my house has been ruined by a murder. I shall go for the police; the bloody corpse shall not disgrace me another minute!"

The excited woman, who was honest enough, would have rushed from the room if the quick hand of the detective had not caught and held her back.

"Sit down and cool off!" he commanded, leading her to a chair, while he nodded to Phil to shut the door. "I want to know something about this boarder of yours, madam. After that I promise you this case will get into the hands of the police soon enough."

"Who are you?" cried Mrs. Motts, looking up into Derringer's face.

"I am a detective; and with this brief explanation, I again ask you to proceed."

It was without doubt the first time in her life that the woman had been confronted by a detective, and it was plain that she would not hesitate to give the one before her all the information at her command.

"My lodger in room twenty-one, came here about a month ago," explained the woman. "She gave her name as Viota Estrange, which I have cause to think was not her true name, but that was none of my business. I never got to see much of her. She generally kept her room during the day and went out at night, but never remained long. Once I was called into her room by a series of groans, and then I saw a rich bracelet on the dressing-stand, with the initials E. S. upon the clasp."

Mrs. Motts paused abruptly, for she had reached the end of her story.

"Had she no visitors?" asked the detective.

"None. Stay! four days ago a boy came here with a letter for Viota Estrange, and I delivered it."

"Well?"

"She broke it open the moment it was placed

in her hand, and tore it up, saying: "I'd sooner see death come than *him*!"

"That is all you know?"

"That is all."

"Now, madam, I beg of you not to mention my visit to your house, prior to the discovery of the body up-stairs by the authorities. Justice demands the apprehension of the person or persons concerned in this murder."

"Do you think more than one person did it?"

"I have no opinion."

The woman bit her lip and looked disappointed.

"I will see that the police are informed," continued Derringer. "Remember: you need not volunteer the information that I have been here. Come, Phil. We've seen enough here for to-night."

"You won't take the room, then?"

"Not in its present condition," laughed Dick Derringer. "Good-night, madam."

The two companions passed from the house into the street, where the snow kissed their faces, and where the wind whistled around the deserted corners.

For some distance, speaking not, they made their way afoot.

More than once Phil Flash looked up into the detective's face in the lamplight, and found it intensely sober in expression, as if the famous man-hunter was trying to get at the mystery of the house on Mott street.

"I guess he's got all he wants to handle," ejaculated the boy. "There must be a good deal in this case to make Dick think that way. A dead woman in a little room with no marks about her, but murdered all the same, with her ring finger cut off and her rings gone! There's mystery enough here for a dozen novels; but I expect it won't get into any. Dick carried nothing from the room, but yet he says he will get to the bottom of the mystery. He'll find me ready to help him, and when he gets down to work, he'll discover that Phil Flash has an idea or two worth more than a passing notice."

Across the street, and almost opposite the city detective and his pard, walked a man who was strikingly handsome. He saw the couple, and his actions told that he was watching them with the eye of a hawk. In figure he was rather tall, elegantly molded, and quick and active as a cat. His eyes were dark and full of brilliance; but the contour of his face was hidden by a silky black beard, which added much to his appearance.

"Well, the boy delivered my letter, and you have seen the occupant of Room 21," this man exclaimed, while he watched Richard Derringer. "I have given you a good mystery, Richard; now sail in and do your best. But let me tell you here that you must not press the game too close. It won't do, my friend; and besides, it might prove dangerous business."

For several squares the man with the black beard followed the detective, when he suddenly left him and turned back, and Dick and Phil were permitted to proceed unmolested.

They went back to the detective's cosy office on Broadway, where the overcoat was thrown aside and the shin-toasting proceeded again.

"Phil," suddenly cried Richard Derringer, starting from his reverie, "you must take a note for me to the head office."

There was no reply, and the Broadway detective discovered that Phil Flash had disappeared.

"Hang the boy! He's gone off with a notion that he will work up the case on his own hook!" he exclaimed. "He's served us well, off and on, as spotter and spy, but he must not attempt game like this. I didn't notice him go, but he is as slippery as an eel, and can vanish like the magician's trick egg. What I wanted him to do I'll have to do myself."

Phil had stolen from the detective's quarters with a noiselessness that would have done credit to the most accomplished police spy.

"I'll take a hand of my own in this affair," he muttered to himself. "If I'm ever going to be a first-class detective, this is just the kind of case I want to open up on. I've got a cue in the marked hand that delivered to me the mysterious letter for Dick. When I run him down I'll be near the solution of the mystery; but it'll not be a straight trail to him, I'm thinking. Here goes, anyhow. Hang Phil Flash for a pelican, if he doesn't give Dick a close chase for the marked hand."

As Phil rushed down the street he came rather suddenly upon one of the many cheap eating-houses that keep open all night in the city and knowing that a cup of warm coffee would reach the desired spot, he went in and took a seat at one of the tables.

A good many people of all degrees were enjoying the cheap hospitalities of the place, and Phil found himself relegated to a corner table and the last seat at that.

"I'm not Vanderbilt, therefore I'll not order truffles and such dishes," said Phil, throwing down the well-fingered bill of fare and looking up into the waiter's face. "Bring me coffee and soup."

Away marched the waiter and a short distance off he halted, inflated his lungs and bawled out "Coffee and soup!" with a ludicrous emphasis that brought down a part of the house.

Almost at the same moment another waiter near by rattled off an order, the variety and expense of which drew the eyes of many to the man who had given it.

"Jehosaphat! my order looks like a shadow alongside o' that last one," said Phil, looking toward the table from which it had come. "I never knew that millionaires dropped in here to lunch."

It happened that from his corner the boy spotter could see the back and the shapely shoulders of the man who had given the expensive order, and his eye became fixed upon them.

"There is something familiar in the cut o' them shoulders," said the boy to himself. "I've seen them somewhere and lately, too. I'll watch their owner till I get a look at his face."

The boy detective sipped his coffee and soup at his leisure, but all the time he watched the man who was discussing the best supper the house afforded.

"He'll give me a sight of his face when he gets up," murmured Phil. "I'll hang over this bowl of soup till plum daylight if he sits that long. Hello! there goes his last glass of wine. Now, my friend, I'll take a peep at your phiz."

At that moment the man so carefully watched by the boy pushed his chair back and got up. As he turned to get the overcoat and hat he had hung on the wall near the table, Phil got his first view of his face.

"Just about what I expected!" exclaimed the boy. "I hit the nail on the head by dropping in here. I know that man. Of course I've seen him before, and that this very night. What would Richard Derringer do if he were here with a bonanza like this on his hands? What! are you off, my marked cherub? I'm off, too!"

The man discovered by Phil was totally unaware of the young spy's presence. Having paid for his supper, he stopped at the cigar counter invested in and lit a twenty-five cent cigar and passed out.

Of course Phil Flash was close at his heels, and was ready for a long chase.

He had found the identical man who had given him the startling letter for the Broadway detective; he knew him by the black beard which he believed was false, and by the hand which displayed its tell-tale mark in the glare of the cigar light.

What better fortune could happen the boy than this? He was already on the trail, while Richard Derringer, the renowned detective was dozing at his fire with his plans but half formed!

The marked hand led Phil a long chase sure enough. He seemed determined to settle his own and the boy's supper before he stopped, but at last he drew up in front of a house on Bleeker street, near Broadway.

From a safe point of observation near by the boy saw his quarry enter by means of a night-key, and the door closed behind him.

"I'll just get the number of that house," muttered Phil, advancing upon the house. "This is luck enough for one night. The man who sent that letter to Richard knows how and why Viola Estrange died, and that is what I'm going to know. I've got to go up to the door to see the number."

Phil crept up the steps of the house which seemed to have been enshrouded with a strange silence since the man's disappearance, and the next moment he was trying to make out the number over the door.

All at once the portal flew open and Phil recoiled with an exclamation of horror. He could not tell how he reached the middle of the sidewalk, but he suddenly landed there in time to see a human figure pounce upon him with the swiftness of an eagle.

"See, here, my young shadower. I don't want you to bother the game!" said a voice as a hand alighted on the boy's shoulder and he found a pair of gleaming black eyes fixed upon him. "I didn't take you into consideration until a while ago; but, no difference; I'll attend to you now!"

Phil involuntarily drew back, but the mad grip of the hand tightened, and the closing fingers seemed to sink into his flesh. "Were you

trying to make out the number, or do you want to see the interior of this Bleeker street palace?" laughed the man. "Come, my boy spotter; I will introduce you to sights never seen before. And in New York, too."

There was no escape for the boy. He drew back again, but the man jerked him forward, and the next minute the door shut hard behind him.

CHAPTER III.

GENIA.

AMONG the many thousands of New Yorkers who read the sensational newspaper account of the mystery of the room on Mott street, was Detective Dick. Despite the events of the night he had enjoyed a sound sleep, and was waiting for Phil, who usually invaded his apartments at an early hour in the morning.

But this morning the boy spotter did not show up, and Richard Derringer lighted a cigar and strolled out upon the street.

The snow which had fallen the previous night, had already disappeared, and the morning gave promises of a warmer day.

Here and there the detective recognized acquaintances who insisted on talking about the mystery, and invariably wound up by asking the Broadway spotter whether he intended to take hold of the case. His sole reply was that he did not know, which, in fact, as the reader may guess, was not the exact truth.

The shrewdest reporters had not been able to throw any light on the mystery, and, as usual, they indulged in various theories, some of which must have taxed their ingenuity. One said that the missing finger had been amputated by some one who had never performed an operation of the kind, and another reported it the work of an accomplished surgeon.

They all agreed that the motive was robbery, but strange to say, a gold watch was found in one of the ransacked drawers. Nobody knew anything about Viola Estrange, as the dead woman was called, and Madam Motts could give no information destined to throw any light upon the mystery.

She kept her promise to the detective, and did not mention the visit to her house of himself and Phil.

The police had been informed by telephone, and that by a man who had sent the news from a public station. The morning papers said that efforts were being made to trace this man, as it was thought that he was connected in some manner with the crime.

In fact, this much-wanted man was the Broadway detective well disguised, and having posted the police, he had returned to his office and resumed his usual habit, that of toasting his feet.

More than once the detective examined the strange letter, which had been sent him through Phil by the man with the marked hand. He was satisfied that the writer knew something about the woman's death, and that he was a person who was inclined to sneer at his (Dick's) detective abilities. He went back over Madam Mott's story about her lodger. She expected a visitor; the letter brought to the house for her a few hours before the crime, told her that she was likely to receive some one whom she feared and hated, else why did she say that she would sooner meet death than see that person?

Detective Dick was certain that that person had come, and also that when he went away, he carried with him the finger and the ring.

Nothing among the dead woman's effects threw any light upon her identity. The watch once had initials inside the case, but they had lately been cut away and chemicals had obliterated certain marks on the linen.

It was, indeed, a mystery.

While the city was discussing this strange crime, a young girl of seventeen was sewing at a machine in a little room on the third floor of a certain building more than a mile from the scene of the murder and robbery.

The apartment contained a bed, two chairs and a table besides the machine, whose noise was the only music the worker heard.

The beauty of the girl was very striking, a well-rounded face and deep blue eyes. The latter watched the work she was putting through the machine with a good deal of interest, and her feet worked the treadle without a moment's rest.

In the midst of her work she was surprised by a rap on the door, and she had no sooner bade her visitor "come in" than she was confronted by a young man, at sight of whom the girl gave a slight start of aversion.

"Good-morning, Genia," accosted the new comer, removing his hat as he crossed the threshold. "You will pardon this early call,

but I cannot pass the house without coming up, you know."

He was about twenty-six, handsome and well-formed; but deep in his eyes lurked a sinister expression that would not have escaped the gaze of the close observer. He was faultlessly dressed, and his clothes contrasted strangely with the humble lodgings of Genia, the working-girl.

Without an invitation, he picked up the extra chair and carried it to the machine, where he seated himself and turned the battery of his intensely black eyes upon the girl.

"The city's got a new sensation this morning," he continued. "This time it is a real Parisian crime. A good chance for me to try my hand, Genia. Ha! ha!"

His laugh sounded strangely in the little room.

"Well, what is it?" asked the girl.

"A woman has been found dead in Mott street, with one of her fingers missing. She has been dead about four days. A beautiful woman, once somebody, no doubt, but forced by circumstances to the lodgings in which she died."

The look of the sewing-girl had become a stare by the time the young man had finished.

"Why, what is the matter, Genia?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing," the girl said, with an effort. "These horrible crimes unnerve me. I wish men would forget wickedness."

"And all be good, eh? By George! girl, you'd have the millennium here to-morrow, if you had your way."

"Indeed I would," said Genia, going back to her work.

"Then let us start it," he went on, leaning forward with a chuckle. "I don't see why you hold out, Genia, when with a wave of my hand I can transform this room into a palace."

She looked up and met his eye with a stern expression.

"You know why I hold out," she said. "I shall find my mother first."

"And the estate?"

"I don't care so much for that. I can work here and make a good living. I don't want a palace, Custer."

"No palace? ho, ho! shoot me for a Creed-moor target! if you ain't the first queen that preferred a hovel! Let me take a peep at those old papers again, Genia."

"With pleasure. They're my treasure, you know. Some day they will prove worth their weight in diamonds."

The eyes of the young man sparkled when the girl left the machine and went to the bed between the mattresses of which she thrust her hands.

"My God! they are gone!" she suddenly exclaimed starting back and showing her visitor a face whitened in an instant. "Custer! Custer! my papers have been stolen!"

"Oh, I guess not," said the young man in a careless, off-hand way as he came forward. "You have pushed them back further than usual."

"I hope I have, but it cannot be," and Genia returned to the bed which she examined again.

"No, they are not here! God above! who can have robbed me? May the curses of Heaven overtake the villain!"

Unnerved and unsteady, Genia reeled rather than walked, covering her face with her hands. The young man looked on with a faint smile at the corners of his mouth.

"What's the reward for the paper?" he suddenly asked.

"Everything I possess in the world," cried the girl. "The finder shall have my friendship."

"Nothing else?"

"What more can I give? Do you intend to hunt the thief, Custer? A thousand thanks beforehand. They tell me that you are already a clever detective. But where can you find a clue to my lost papers? When did the robber come and how? I have not left my room for a moment for a week save last night when I took my work home myself, instead of having it sent for because I wanted to make a few purchases. Did the villain come then?"

"That is to be discovered if the reward will justify the hunt," was the answer.

The sewing girl gave him a strange look and came closer.

"Find my papers," she said laying her hand on his arm. "They are my proofs that I am more than Genia Hale, the sewing girl of New York. What do you mean, Custer Sharpe, when you say that the trail will be discovered if the reward justifies the hunt?"

"You ought to know, Genia," said the amateur detective.

"But I do not."

"Then, to be plain, if you will give me your hand for the papers I will undertake the hunt. That is what I mean."

For a moment the girl let her hand rest on his arm then she drew back and contemplated him from a little distance.

"This is the advantage you take is it?" she slowly asked. "You see that I am almost helpless. Life itself is hardly dearer to me than the papers I have lost. You will hunt them up if I promise to become your wife when they are returned?"

"Yes."

"My God! I cannot do that, Custer Sharpe," she cried.

"Very well," he said, coldly. "I guess you will have to hunt the papers yourself, Genia, or put the case into the hands of some one else."

He put on his hat and stepped toward the door.

"She'll come to it before I leave the house," he said to himself. "She will never let me go away thus."

Genia stood in the middle of the room like a statue, her eyes fastened in a half-vacant stare upon Custer Sharpe.

"You—won't—help—me—if—I don't—promise?" she asked.

"What's the use, Genia?"

"Then go! I now know the value of your friendship!" she exclaimed, starting forward suddenly. "Dear as the papers are to me, I can't consent to become your wife for their return. No, no! I have another friend. Thank Heaven, he will exact no such promise."

"The young spotter, Phil Flash, eh?" laughed the amateur detective. "If you put your trust in his detective abilities, Genia, you build on sand. Why, that young hanger-on at headquarters couldn't find a thief with a handful of clues. Phil Flash! ho, ho! You'll never see those papers if you put the case into his hands! Good-morning, Genia."

He gave her a parting bow and stepped across the threshold, but more than half-unwillingly. She did not call him back, and he went down the stairs considerably disappointed.

"She wouldn't promise," he muttered. "Confound it! she is wrapped up in that young spotter. I fancy that the papers would not be hard to find, though it might take some shrewd work. That girl believes that those old documents will establish her claim to a big English estate at her mother's death. She is right there. But the mother has been missing for years, and not half a dozen persons in America know that Genia Hale is the heiress. There's a big bonanza here—bigger than those they have in the far West. The boy, Phil Flash, knows it, and while he is her champion, he is a stumbling-block in my way. I am going to get my hands on the bonanza and the girl, too. There is nothing slow about Custer Sharpe when he gets down to business of this kind. A girl has lost her heirship papers, and a woman her life and a finger. Put these two cases side by side and what a double sensation they make! Well, never mind, Genia. I've only begun to show my hand."

Custer Sharpe the amateur detective was on the street again, and the sewing-girl was locking up her little room from the outside.

She did not see him when she reached the street below, nor did she want a glimpse of him.

"I must find Phil at once," she said, as she hurried off. "Without my papers I am lost forever."

Thirty minutes later the girl rung the bell of a little house some distance from her own quarters, and a pleasant old woman responded.

"Phil?" was Genia's greeting.

"He did not come home last night," was the response. "He has not missed before in a year."

The sewing-girl could not speak.

If she had known where Phil Flash was, she might have fainted.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE CAGE.

THE man who dragged the boy spotter into the house on Bleecker street, did not sport the elegant black beard which the youth had followed to the spot.

"So you want to see where I live, hey?" he laughed in Phil's face, as he landed in a dimly-lighted hall-way, with the door shut behind him.

"Well, my young lynx, I will try to accommodate you."

Phil looked into the face of the speaker, and saw a pair of eyes that boded him no good, then he glanced at the man's hands, but they were incased in gloves.

The door when it shut, had given out a peculiar noise, which Phil knew was the snap of a lock, and with the click echoing in his ears, he was taken up-stairs by his captor and pushed into a room as poorly lighted as the hall below.

"I guess I'm in a pretty pickle," ejaculated the boy to himself. "I have tracked the right man home—there's no doubt of that—but he has me in his clutches. What was that he said about introducing me to sights I had never seen before? I'm ready to see them now."

The boy was alone, for the hand which had clutched his shoulder had relaxed its terrible grip, and he was the sole occupant of the strange room.

The walls were entirely bare of furniture, and the ceiling was rather high. In the middle of the room stood a small table and two chairs, one on either side, as if two persons had lately occupied them. There was nothing in the room for the boy to inspect, and he went to one of the windows.

Across the two windows which the room contained, were heavy iron bars placed so close together, that no person could get between. Phil could look through them upon the street lamps burning on the street below, and see people flitting hither and thither in their light.

He was at one of the windows when the one door leading into the room opened with little noise, and he saw two men enter and advance to the table.

These men wore masks of some black stuff, which concealed their faces to the chin. Two pairs of keen eyes looked out from behind the masks and regarded Phil with a sternness of expression calculated to awe him.

"Come here!" ordered one of the men.

Phil went forward and halted at the table.

"Your name is Philip Flash, isn't it?"

"Phil Flash," was the answer.

"You are in the employ of the Broadway Detective Bureau?"

"I am employed by no agency."

"No falsehoods, boy!" growled one of the twain.

"You'll get none from me."

"If you are not in the employ of the Bureau, why do you frequent it?"

"I am a detective on my own hook."

"Oho!" laughed the men in concert. "But you frequent Dick Derringer's rooms?"

"Yes. He and I are friends."

"Just so. You went with him to Mott street to-night?"

"I did."

"Do you know what he thinks of the case you found there?"

"I never questioned him."

"He keeps his opinions to himself, then?"

"He does."

For a moment the two men were silent, as if they had reached the end of the inquisition.

"Well, what do you think of it, Phil Flash?" suddenly asked the man who had not spoken up to that moment.

"Do you want my honest opinion?"

"Nothing less."

"Then I believe that somebody will pay for that piece of work one of these days!" declared the boy, bluntly.

"It was a mean, cowardly murder, and the mutilation of the hand was the meanest part of the affair."

"Do you intend to take the case in hand?"

"I do! The woman called Viota Estrange was nobody to me. I work up cases partly for the excitement there is in it, and because I like to see criminals brought to justice. It is dangerous work, I know, but I like it all the same."

"Well, my young fox, you may not get to pursue the present case," said the first spokesman.

"The persons who played their deadly hand on Mott street do not intend to have a cur snapping at their heels. Dick Derringer has been challenged to find the slayer of the woman in Room 21, admitting that she died by violence. Let him accept the challenge and go to work, if he will; but you are not to complicate matters. See here; as you have been so anxious to see the inside of this house, you will remain till you have thoroughly inspected at least a portion of it. Escape, my boy, is impossible. The janitor is one who thoroughly understands his business. You are buried in this house as surely as though you lay under the earth in Greenwood. This is your reward for services rendered Richard Derringer, the Broadway detective."

"I am not in his employ, I tell you!" exclaimed Phil. "I work on my own hook, and, by Jupiter, sooner or later I will get to the end of this case!"

The two men laughed boisterously, but this did not daunt the boy.

"You may laugh in the trap that has caught

Phil Flash!" he went on, striding toward them. "This is your hour; the next may be mine! I give you fair warning, whoever you are. I am going to the bottom of the Mott street mystery, as sure as my name is Phil Flash, of New York!"

Another laugh was the only answer the boy got, and while it still sounded in the room, the two men strode to the door and threw it open.

"Remember, it is diamond cut diamond!" exclaimed Phil, covering the masked worthies with outstretched finger. "If you get rid of me this side of the *denouement*, all right! If I win, I will celebrate my victory."

That was all; the two men passed out, and the door was shut in the boy's face.

"He might get away after all," said the most quiet one, suddenly clutching his companion's arm in the hallway. "I don't like the eye that burns in that boy's head. Confound it all! let me go back and finish him."

"No; this house holds like the grave," was the reply, accompanied by a shake of the head. "His threats are idle ones. When that kid baffles me, I am ready to surrender myself to the courts."

"You take the risk, then?"

"I do."

Phil Flash, with his ear at the door to which he had glided without noise, heard a part of this conversation, and then heard the two men go down the stairs.

"Cooped up at the first stage of the game! That's not very encouraging," ejaculated the boy. "I wonder if mother and Genia don't wonder where I am to-night? They know nothing of the Mott street mystery, and I don't know very much myself. I'm not in a very flattering way to know more about it just now, either. Well, if I had a place to stretch my limbs, I'd lie down and take a sleep over these adventures."

The boy had already noticed that the room contained no bed, and he was about to throw himself upon the hard, bare floor for an attempt at slumber when something fell from the ceiling and alighted near him.

The unexpected object was a bundle of bed-clothes, and Phil's first look was overhead. But the trap-door had already closed, and he saw no signs of it in the dull ceiling that hung over him with nothing to relieve it.

He was not in a mood to reject the proffered couch, and the next moment he had carried the bundle to one corner of the room where he quickly undid it.

It consisted of one pillow and covering enough for the night, and before long Phil had thrown himself upon the poor bed and lay awake watching the stars that peeped in at one of the barred windows.

"Hello! what is this?" he suddenly exclaimed feeling something that appeared to be sewed up in the thick counterpane. "It cannot be that I have a friend in this Bleeker street trap. It feels like a piece of paper. I'm going to see what it is."

It took the boy some time to open the bed covering, and when he had accomplished this task his fingers held a bit of paper closely folded and evidently intended for him.

The lamp on the table was burning very low, and Phil crept toward it with eagerness ablaze in his eyes. He was burning to read the contents of the paper found in the bed-clothes.

Taking the lamp from the table, he placed it on the floor and unfolded the message while he held his breath.

It might not be for him after all, but for some previous prisoner who had failed to find it.

However, Phil worked away with a good deal of zeal, and at last bent forward to read the lines. He saw these words:

"I am certain you can get out by swearing not to further molest the two men. If you persist in your present course, you will never see your friends again. This house just now is the greatest death-trap in New York. If you really value life, purchase it with an oath."

This letter whether intended for Phil or not had no signature. The boy spotter read it twice before he looked up.

"I will do no such thing!" he cried resolutely. "I will not purchase liberty with an oath to leave this mysterious case. The writer of this note means well enough, but I will not obey it. Two men, eh? I know how many shrewd villains I have against me. The man with the marked hand has a pard. Swear to let them go on in their villainy? May I rot here first!"

The resolute boy crushed the paper in his hands and looked toward the ceiling. If the sender of the message was looking down upon him he could not see the face.

"I was never yet in a snap that I didn't get out of it!" he said. "I'm much obliged to you for the interest you take in me; but I take no oaths to leave the trail I've struck; not one!"

The next moment the boy spotter had stretched himself upon the poor bed and his breathings soon told that he was asleep.

It takes a brave boy to sleep in a situation like this, but Phil Flash was one of that kind.

CHAPTER V.

CUSTER SHARPE'S "HAND."

"LET me get a grip on the papers and I'll bring her to terms. I've got a pretty good idea where they are, and if I play the right kind of a game I can get my hands on them. Now's the time for you to deal a good stroke of policy, Custer Sharpe, for the girl is a prize worth playing for. Men don't steal valueless documents nowadays, and the ones Genia guarded so well are worth more than their weight in gold."

Custer Sharpe, the good-looking and keen young amateur detective, had just emerged from his lodgings when he relieved himself of these words. It was night again—the night after his interview with Genia the sewing-girl, or the second night of Phil's imprisonment, if he was still a tenant of the barred room on Bleeker street.

The young man's acquaintance with the girl had been the result of a street incident, and he would not see that Genia did not encourage him.

Too much money had ruined the young fellow who really possessed some talents, and he had drifted from bad to worse until, when we introduce him to the reader, he had become unscrupulous, and pursued the calling of an amateur detective in order to keep up his supply of cash by practices quite the reverse of honesty. More than one well-to-do citizen was in the toils spread by this young scamp, and the black mail levied from his victims enabled Custer Sharpe to keep up a show of style and wealth.

He had often seen the papers guarded so zealously by Genia; he knew that they established her claim to a large estate across the water. The girl had confided to him the simple yet somewhat mysterious story of her life; he knew that she was a waif, that she had a dim recollection of crossing the ocean with a very beautiful woman who called her "daughter," that she was suddenly deserted in New York, and that since one night, years ago, she had never seen the beautiful woman. When Genia had reached her twelfth year a little package came to her in a mysterious manner, and the papers now taken from her by some one were its contents.

Custer Sharpe knew all this, we say, and for months he had been hunting for the missing mother, picking up threads here and there which turned out to be the wrong ones, and reporting his poor success to Genia who always thanked him for his zeal.

"Now, sir, I'm going to do something," said the amateur detective, on the night just mentioned. "I'm going to throw some almighty broad hints about those missing papers. He may think I have not discovered anything; but he shall discover before morning that I am no fool."

Custer Sharpe bent his steps toward that part of the city where Bleeker street lay, and about nine o'clock he stood before the very door which had lately closed on the fortunes of the boy spotter.

If Custer had known what ill-fortune had overtaken Phil in that house he might not have been so eager to cross its threshold, but as he was ignorant of the boy's adventures, he pulled the bell and waited for the janitor.

"Well, sir, what is it?" said the man who opened the door and showed the young detective a face dark and almost tigerish in its expression.

"I have important business with Mr. Simon Sampson," answered Custer.

"I'll see him."

"I'll go myself," said the young fellow pushing past the porter. "You need not take the trouble to announce me. I know where to find Simon."

The porter stepped toward Custer and half-raised a clinched hand, but did not molest him as if he feared to raise the ire of the man he served.

Custer Sharpe seemed thoroughly acquainted with the interior of the house he had entered, for he went down the hall a little ways, and laid his hand on the knob of a door at his right.

"Now, Custer, play it cool. You've got the upper hand in this game," he said to himself, and pushing the door open he entered a well-lighted room.

"Heavens!" exclaimed a voice, and a handsome woman sprung to her feet and pointed at the young man. "Look there, Simon. We have a visitor we don't want to see."

At the same moment a large man sprung back from the table at which he and the woman had been seated, and glared at the amateur detective.

It was a striking tableau.

The lamp that burned on the table revealed a lot of papers, some but partially opened, and others folded like legal documents. Custer had surprised the pair in the act of examining them.

He could not but contrast the striking beauty of the woman with the powerful figure of the man called Simon Sampson. She must have been about forty, with a queenly figure, flashing eyes and a determined mien. He was handsome, too, and as his look showed decidedly dangerous.

"Good-night, Simon," said Custer Sharpe. "I am lucky to find you at home. I hope I have not disturbed you, but the fact is, of course, that I did not know you were engaged."

"We were, sir," said the woman who had the quickest tongue.

"Never mind, never mind," and Simon Sampson waved his hand toward his partner to silence her. "If Mr. Sharpe is here on business, I am at his service."

"I am here on business."

With a look which the amateur detective would never forget, the woman withdrew to the door, and then, with an exchange of looks with Simon, passed swiftly from the room.

"Be seated, sir," said Simon Sampson, to his visitor as he dropped back into his chair at the table.

Custer Sharpe took the chair that happened to be within reach and found himself face to face with the man he had come to see.

For a moment the two men eyed one another in a singular manner, as if they were preparing for a conflict of some kind, then the detective with his eyes fixed more on the papers on the table than on the man before him said:

"Have you gone over them carefully, Simon?"

"Over what?" asked Simon Sampson, and his brow grew suddenly black as he spoke.

"Over the papers there. The girl is nearly distracted over her loss."

Instead of bounding from his chair as some men might have done, Simon Sampson leaned forward and looked closely at the young man.

"Keep cool; you've hit him hard," said Custer Sharpe to himself, and then he looked at Simon without another word.

"What do you mean, sir?" suddenly asked Simon Sampson, and his voice was full of well-feigned indignation. "Those papers there are mine."

"Oh, yes, I see they are. She wants them badly, though."

"She?—who?"

"Genia."

The effect was electrical. Simon Sampson was on his feet in an instant.

"Don't get excited, Simon," said the amateur detective wonderfully cool, and at the same time he drew a self-cocking revolver, and held it carelessly but with a firm grip. "On the contrary, sit down and listen to me."

Sit down? Simon Sampson looked as if he would sooner fly at Custer Sharpe and tear his throat. He did not move.

"Oblige me by sitting down," continued the young schemer. "I am here on very important business that concerns more than one person. You know that by this time, Simon. Sit down!"

Simon Sampson fairly ground his teeth as he dropped back into his chair. He moved his hand across the table toward certain of the papers when he was met by the young detective's voice again.

"Don't touch those documents. I didn't have to think long to trace them out, ha, ha!"

"What do you mean?"

"Those papers are the ones stolen from Genia."

"These?"

"Yes."

"By heavens! you know more than I do, then."

"Come, Simon. I hold the best hand just now, and you know it very well. A woman was found dead in Mott street the other night. That woman was murdered."

Custer Sharpe was looking Simon in the eye, but there was no response. The lips of the man before him were tightly shut, his eyes had now a stare.

"You hear me, Simon?" the amateur detective went on.

"Yes."

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"I say that the woman in Mott street was murdered."

"I heard you."

"One of her fingers had been cut off."

"Maybe I saw that in the papers. I read them," said Simon, scarcely moving his lips.

"Well, I saw the body," continued Custer Sharpe. "I searched the room."

"Well?"

"In one corner I found evidence enough to hang a certain man now in this city."

"Of course you'll proceed to do it."

Simon Sampson had now opened his lips, and showed his teeth.

"I found a button of a most peculiar pattern. It was once the property of my friend Simon Sampson!"

The young detective had spoken his last sentence in tones designed to be effective. He expected it to fall upon Simon's ears like a thunderclap; he would not have been surprised if Mr. Sampson had bounded from his chair. But on the contrary, Simon sat still, and showed no signs of rushing from the room.

"The finding of that button is a proof of good eyes, Custer," he said, coolly. "May I ask whether it is for sale?"

"It is," replied Custer.

"What buys it?"

"Those papers," and the detective's eyes rested again upon the documents on the table. "Give me Genia's papers, and you shall clasp the button found in the room on Mott street."

"If I refuse—what?" asked Simon.

"You ought to know," was the answer.

"Very well. I don't make trades like this."

The answer was made in tones which told Custer Sharpe that it had been weighed beforehand.

"Then, by the eternal, Simon Sampson, I will proceed to play a game that will make certain knees shake!" cried Custer, leaving his chair. "Don't I know that the man who amputated the finger of the corpse for certain rings once graduated at a medical school? You've got your diploma yet, haven't you, Simon? If you refuse to trade, all right! Recollect that the man who did the Mott street business is in Custer Sharpe's clutches. The two crimes are closely connected—the murder there, and the theft of Genia's papers. You won't trade, eh?"

"I'd kill him if he did!" exclaimed a voice behind the young detective.

Custer Sharpe wheeled like a person stabbed in the back. He saw the woman—Simon Sampson's partner—fly at him with the fury of a tigress, and before he could lift a hand in self-defense, her fingers were at his throat.

At the same time Simon leaped to the woman's assistance, and Custer staggered back helpless before the combined attack.

"I'd kill Simon, help me Heaven if I wouldn't! if he gave up a single paper!" hissed the tigress in the detective's ears. "You have come to your death, Custer Sharpe. Fools only give their schemes away before they have a sure thing! Ha! ha! I'll openly tell you now that we are playing a game that will make us rich as Croesus! Want the girl's papers, eh? Maybe you want the missing finger, too, ha, ha, ha!"

The tightening of four hands at Custer's throat deprived him of the last echoes of the woman's devilish laugh, and as the room and its sights spun in confusion before his eyes, he fell unconscious against the wall.

"Luck is in our favor, Simon," laughed the woman. "We are catching all the foxes."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BIRD GETS AWAY.

PHIL FLASH slept soundly despite his situation in the upper room with the barred windows. He had resolutely rejected the avenue of escape offered in the message found sewed up in the bed-clothes; he would never take an oath not to hunt the perpetrators of the crime in Mott street.

"Give me time and I will come out of this trap right side up and in good fighting trim!" he exclaimed just before he fell asleep. "They don't catch Philip Flash with a bait like that, not much, my larks of the black mask."

Morning broke over the city and the imprisoned boy saw the busy sights below. Nobody looked up at the window; his prison was nothing to the many hundreds who pressed the pavements with eager feet.

Some time during his sound sleep his morning meal had been brought to him, and when he broke the hard loaf a little package dropped to the floor.

Hastily opening it, the young detective found a miniature saw and file made from the best of steel.

"I am expected to file through my window-

bars and jump to the street, am I?" he laughed. "If that is the game to get rid of me it will not succeed. I don't want these instruments. I am going out by another route."

But the saw and file were concealed on his person, and the boy discussed his breakfast with good zest, for he was hungry.

He saw the day pass and night come again. With eager eyes he watched the lighting of the lamps on the street, and more than once looked at his door as if he expected a visitor.

At ten o'clock he heard a light footstep in the hall beyond, and a moment later a key turned in the lock and Phil had a visitor sure enough.

This time it was not the man with the marked hand, nor he of the black mask; on the contrary, his caller was a woman, who looked very beautiful in the light of the boy's lamp.

From the moment of her entrance she fixed a pair of dark eyes on Phil and came forward slowly with her gaze still riveted upon him.

"I don't like to see you cooped up here, Phil Flash," she said. "Come, don't be a fool. Your mother wonders what has become of you."

The boy burst into a laugh that perplexed the woman.

"You want me out of here, eh? Just open that door and give me free passage to the landing," he cried. "I didn't expect to have any one take such an interest in me in this exquisite den. Thanks, my friend; but don't trouble yourself about me on my mother's account. I'll report soon enough."

"You will? Ah, then you are willing to take the oath?"

"Did I say so?"

"No, but—"

"I take no oaths!" interrupted the boy.

"Don't I know that I'm on a hot trail?"

The woman reached the young spy with a single stride.

"If that is the case we will see that you never get to the end of it!" she hissed clutching Phil's arm. "You are Dick Derringer's paid spotter. We know that and—"

"You know nothing of the kind," was the response. "Richard Derringer never paid me one dollar for any work. I am my own detective bureau. Dick and I have worked together, but I never take pay from him."

"Oh, you little fox, you know what a lie is!" cried the tigress, shaking Phil and displaying a good deal of strength. "So you intend to get to the end of the trail you think you have struck?"

"Bet your life, my New York Cleopatra!"

"You never shall! This house shall become the tomb of Phil Flash, as it is that of another who invaded it awhile ago."

The boy started at these words.

Did the woman mean that Dick had entered the trap and lost his life? Phil could think of no one else.

"Very well. If you have finished Dick remember that he has left an avenger behind. Don't you see now that somebody bungled at the beginning of this job? It wasn't necessary to send by me a challenge to him to take up the Mott street mystery. Somebody thought he had too sure a grip on that mystery."

All this while the blazing eyes of the woman were fixed upon him.

"We'll make amends for the blunder," she said. "You will not take the oath, boy?"

"Never!"

"Very well, take the consequences, then."

The woman dropped Phil's arm and stepped back.

"Now's my time if ever!" muttered Phil Flash. "By Jehu! I'll make a break for freedom if I don't even reach the door."

The next instant he caught up one of the chairs and threw it above his head.

"Look out!" he cried. "I can play with claws when I'm roused. Phil Flash has been trapped before."

The woman saw his intentions and threw up her hands to ward off the threatened blow.

Phil sprung to the attack with the quickness of a young panther.

Down came the chair with all the force he could command, and despite the woman's arms, it staggered its beautiful victim and drew blood.

"It's life or death here!" ejaculated Phil, and another stroke sent the woman against the wall at the foot of which she sunk unconscious.

The key had been left in the door for the city Cleopatra had not expected a turning of the tables like this, and the hand of Phil soon rested upon it.

"They mustn't play with me in prison!" laughed the boy. "I am liable to hurt some-

body. I'd like to know who you are, my lady, but I'll find out by-and-by no doubt. You are in league with the Marked Hand—I can see that. We'll get to the bottom of the mystery after awhile."

The boy spotter turned to the door and unlocked it. Going into the hall, he looked over the balustrade and saw nothing but the little lamp that swung near the lower door.

The silence of death seemed to reign throughout the house and if Phil had been less courageous he would have heard the beating of his own heart.

Hearing no noise, he took off his shoes and crept down the stairs. It was now a break for liberty and he had to exercise a great deal of caution. Step by step he mastered without the least sound. He had no weapons, and nothing with which to defend himself if surprised and attacked.

"So far, good!" he exclaimed at the bottom of the first flight. "I'm getting along famously. If the tigress I have locked in my prison does not come to, and rouse the house, I will get out safely."

He went down the last steps with renewed hopes, but the change came.

All at once a wild cry reverberated through the house and sounded for a second in the boy spotter's ears like a knell of doom.

Despite his coolness it halted him midway down the flight.

"My tigress has recovered," he said. "Hear her pounding on the door and calling 'Simon! Simon!' Ah, I must not forget that name. Simon who? I will find out by-and-by."

The woman up-stairs was making a terrible racket, quite enough to rouse the whole house. Phil could hear her at the door, and her voice which rose shrilly above her blows, threatened to call in the police.

"I must get out of this," he said. "The Simon for whom she calls might put in an appearance, and I don't want to meet him just now."

The next moment the boy spotter sprang forward and reached the last landing. He had but the door between him and the street.

"Here, you young fox, what ar' you doin' here?" cried a voice and a human figure pounced upon Phil before he could turn.

"Do you keep this door always locked?" said the boy coolly looking into the face of a man of fifty. "Hang me! if I keep my room another day. Don't you hear the racket up-stairs. A woman has taken a crazy spell and I'm off for the doctor. Where is your key? You'd better go up there and keep her from demolishing the house itself. Let me out!"

Phil had guessed that the man was the janitor of the place. He had seen hundreds of such people, and to him they all looked alike. To his delight the man produced a key.

"Hear how that woman raves," said Phil. "Where's Simon?"

"Simon?"

"Simon Somebody. She's splitting her lungs yelling for him."

The janitor shook his head.

"Don't know Simon, eh?" cried the boy as the key turned in the lock. "Mebbe you'll get some information about him later. Ah! here we are!"

The door had opened, and Phil lost no time in reaching the street.

"Once more under the stars!" he exclaimed. "There'll be fun when Simon faces the woman up-stairs. The janitor will let her out before he comes, perhaps. Now, my fragrant city flowers, I'll proceed to blight your prospects. She said that they had entrapped another tracker. Can it be Dick?"

The reader need not be assured here that Phil did not tarry long in front of the Bleecker street trap. The door had hardly shut behind him ere he bounded away and soon had several squares between him and the place.

Jumping upon the first car he found he pursued his journey and left it to turn into Broadway down which he dashed until he reached Richard Derringer's office.

"Gone! Dick has vanished!" he cried when he found the door locked and the commonplace placard "left the city" upon it. "I could find Dick somewhere in that accursed house," he went on. "If there is a worse den in New York, I'd like to see it."

The boy spy went slowly and reflectively back to the sidewalk.

All at once he heard an ejaculation of surprise and turning quickly he saw a pair of sharp eyes fastened upon him.

"Aha! you didn't expect to see me here, eh?" he laughed to himself as a man walked away.

"I think I'd know you in any disguise. You are the man with the marked hand, and, in my humble opinion, the person called Simon by the New York Cleopatra. I won't follow you. Go back to your pard and let her tell you that the bird has escaped from his cage. Look out for Phil Flash from now on, Simon, my friend. I'll go home and assure mother of my safety, and then I'll drop in upon Genia."

Phil and the man went in opposite directions and soon disappeared.

Exactly one hour later he rapped at a certain door, in the third story of a large building, and the young girl who opened it uttered a loud cry of joy.

"Phil! Phil! my papers!" she cried, leading the boy spotter to a chair. "I have lost them at last!"

"It cannot be," was the reply.

"They are gone! Heavens! they were as dear to me as life itself. You know that, Phil. Custer Sharpe was here, and offered to find them."

"He did?—that young villain?" cried the boy. "I would not stop long to believe that he knows exactly where to look for them. I had laid myself out for the Mott street mystery, but your papers come first."

"Think of it—my papers were taken the night the death of Viola Estrange was discovered by the police. Those papers speak of a peculiar ring worn by my mother—a ring which would establish her claim to the estate over the sea, and the papers say that the ring finger of Viola Estrange was missing."

"It was. I saw the corpse myself," said Phil.

"It seems so singular," continued the girl.

The boy spotter made no audible reply, but walked to the window.

"Great Caesar!" he exclaimed to himself.

"What if it should be so?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE PLOT DEEPENS.

I NEED not say that the police were completely mystified by the affair on Mott street. The papers in discussing it termed it the most mysterious case known in the annals of New York crime, and boldly predicted that it would never be unraveled.

As there was no reward offered for the detection of the perpetrators, the various detective agencies did not bestir themselves in the matter, and but for the papers the affair would have been forgotten within twenty-four hours.

Phil Flash, however, had not given up the chase. The remark by Genia, the sewing girl, about the mention of her mother's ring in the missing papers, had put new energy into his hunt, and he was on the street soon afterward. He went back to Dick Derringer's office, but it was still locked, and this served to strengthen his belief that the detective had been inveigled into the man-trap on Bleeker street.

The night and another day passed.

Phil had had a long hunt for Richard, he had visited every place known to be frequented by the detective, but he could not obtain a single clew.

Not once during the fruitless search did he run across Custer Sharpe, the amateur detective, and Genia's persecutor, whom he thoroughly despised. Phil knew a good deal about the young man, and nothing that was very creditable to him. He knew that he would do almost anything to carry out any cherished ends, and as he had told the girl he believed that Custer knew where to look for the stolen papers.

If the boy spotter had found the amateur he would have been shadowed, and there would have been an explanation of some kind. As the reader knew, Custer had fallen into very dangerous hands and was in no condition to give Phil work in running him down.

Nobody would have recognized the boy spotter in the well-made-up bootblack who sung his occupation on Bleeker street near the death-trap the night after his escape. It might have been dangerous for Phil to venture back into that vicinity, especially when the keenest eyes in New York were on the lookout for him, but he was so well disguised and did not look his usual size, that he seemed absolutely safe.

"I'd give my kit if it was gold to get beyond that door," muttered Phil, eying the house which he had cause to recollect. "I wonder how the city Cleopatra feels after being knocked down with a Bleeker street chair. And Simon? They are pigeons worth plucking, I know, and they can if they would, clear up the mystery that surrounds the missing finger. I'll know that marked hand whenever I see it again. It has been slashed with a knife once, and the

scars upon it form a cross on the back. You'd better keep it gloved, man. That hand may hang you one of these fine days if Phil Flash lives and keeps his health."

The windows of the shadowed house were strangely dark, and Phil saw no one at them as he passed calling loudly for boots to black.

Almost directly opposite the premises was a very narrow alley which was as dark as Erebus, and as the night advanced and the calling of the bootblack was no longer wanted, Phil crept into the shadows and sat upon his box with his eyes on the man-trap.

"Somebody will come out, or go in," he said in encouraging tones to himself. "I've watched houses like that before, and I know the habits of their inmates. Whoever leaves that one will be shadowed, and I will know something before morning. Ah, if Simon would come out; or my tigress!"

For two hours the boy never left his box, and his eyes were not taken from the old building.

He did not lose patience; he had played spotter and spy too long for that.

At last the silent vigils of the boy were rewarded, for the front door of the house opened and a man slipped out.

"There's my victim!" exclaimed Phil darting for the alley, and the next moment he had the man in sight and was trying to recognize in him some familiar figure. "I don't know but that you're the fellow who carries the cross on the back of his hand. Let me see; are you masquerading in the black beard again? Ah, yes; you are the detective's challenger sure enough! And my pigeon, too!"

The man did not seem to have the least suspicion that one of the shrewdest boys in New York was at his heels. He did not look back to see whether he was followed, but kept on with an unlighted cigar in his mouth.

"A long chase, I'm afraid," said Phil as he kept after him. "There he turns into Christopher street and goes toward the river!"

The man proceeded down the thoroughfare into which he had turned, and kept on to the ferry-house much to Phil's mystification and astonishment.

"Hang me if he doesn't intend to take me across the river!" exclaimed the boy. "Wherever he goes I will not be far behind."

Sure enough the shadowed man kept straight on to the boat which was about to put off, and Phil followed him on board.

The boy now saw that the man wore gloves and the same black beard as when they first met. He also wore a new overcoat buttoned close, and Phil could not but admire his fine figure which seemed to possess great strength.

If the Marked Hand knew he was shadowed he exhibited no suspicions. He walked through the cabin and planted himself in the cool night wind on the uncovered deck.

"A man like that plays a cool game," murmured Phil as he watched him. "He is playing me now for he isn't making this trip for nothing."

When the boat was half-way across the river the right hand of the shadowed man disappeared beneath his coat, and when it was withdrawn it held something that looked like a little vial.

A thrill passed over the boy-spotter's frame when he noticed this, and he could scarcely refrain from springing forward.

The man stepped toward the edge of the planks with his hand clutching the object taken from an inner pocket and all at once he executed a quick movement which threw it toward the river!

Phil saw something glisten for an instant ere it disappeared, and then the man straightened and a look of satisfaction passed over his face.

A moment later he turned and passed into the gentlemen's cabin, the satisfied light still in his eyes as he almost touched the young spy, and Phil saw him coolly light a cigar on the inside.

"I'd like to clutch what you tossed into the river," said the boy spotter eying him. "I believe I could guess what it was, but no matter—nearly everything in the world can be duplicated. Of course that bottle sunk, and is now at the bottom of the river where it cannot be reached. Covering your tracks up, Simon Somebody, aren't you?"

The boat pursuing its way soon reached the Jersey City wharf and Phil saw his man disembark. The lost button of the great coat had been attended to and the black beard was tucked away beneath its folds.

The twain passed through the ferry-house, and just beyond its threshold the man met a person whom he recognized. This individual was shorter in stature, rather heavily set, and looked as stout as a little giant.

"I thought I'd meet you here," Phil heard the little man say to the ferry-boat's passenger.

"It wasn't necessary. I know the place," was the response. "Besides—"

The rest of the sentence did not reach Phil's ears, for it was uttered in lowered tones and the two walked off.

"Another man in the game," ejaculated Phil starting after them. "There is going to be some sly work done to-night. Here we go down Hudson street! Another long chase I expect."

But this time the boy spotter was agreeably mistaken, for after proceeding a few squares the little man opened a gate between two houses and the twain disappeared beyond it.

Phil tried the same gate a moment later and passed into a dark way where he heard the noise of the shutting of a door somewhere ahead.

As the gate opened and closed without noise, the boy thought himself safe, and he presently saw a glimmer of light a short distance ahead.

Five minutes afterward Phil Flash stood on a dark porch he had never encountered before, and close to a window to which he had applied his keen eyes. The heavy shutters were tightly closed, but as it is a very good shutter that shuts out all sights the boy was looking in upon a scene that delighted him.

He had run the Marked Hand down at last, and now he saw him, with the gloves and the beard laid aside, seated at a table with the small man, and both were examining a lot of papers with eyes that could not conceal their gratification.

Phil saw the true features of the Marked Hand; a handsome but cruel face, a pair of intensely black eyes and a high forehead. He saw the scar-cross on the right hand. It had a strange fascination for the boy as it moved hither and thither over the papers followed by the snake-like eyes of the other man.

"There they are, Felix," suddenly said the Marked Hand, leaning back in his chair and pointing at the papers. "I have done my share of the work for the present. Yours begins here. You know the ways of the English courts; you know how heirships are established. Look at our proofs. They establish everything. She will play her part to perfection. The resemblance is nearly perfect, and besides we have the ring mentioned in the papers before you. She is ready to sail at any time. You must take the game here, Felix. The river never gives up anything that is well weighted. The fox who came for those papers will never bark again."

"But the boy?" asked the little man.

"Pshaw! I will attend to him. He is only out of our clutches for a while, and besides, he can do us no harm. If you play your part of this gold game as I have played mine, we'll finger more wealth than we have ever seen."

"I'll play it!" exclaimed Felix, gathering up the papers. "Yes, I know the English courts. I know how estates are claimed. Let her play her part—let her only look like the disowned lady, and I'll answer for the rest! We can sail in the Eudocia; she leaves next Friday."

"All right. I'll keep things straight here. If the boy should threaten trouble, I'll show him the fox caged forever. As for the girl, we don't fear her. She will continue to make garments for her daily bread. Ha! ha! Felix!" And the hand of the speaker came down heavily upon Felix's back.

That was all.

After awhile Phil crept down from the porch and glided out into the river street again.

"May I never see glory if I don't block this infamous game!" he exclaimed. "I begin to see through the whole scheme now, and it's the blackest one I ever heard of. Going to sail in the Eudocia, eh? We'll see about that!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A BOY BURGLAR.

THE man hounded across the ferry by the boy spotter went leisurely back to New York when he had transacted his business with the person called Felix. He was not followed by Phil, who remained in Jersey City with new work mapped out in his fertile brain.

"The papers have changed hands," he said to himself. "They have passed into the possession of the rascal who is to play his part of the game in England, if he gets there. They are working a rich mine if they only strike pay dirt. More than papers changed hands to-night. What was in that little box that Felix took? Aha! Simon, you have given up the great clew, and I must get my hands on it."

The man from New York was followed to the

ferry by Felix, who came back alone and with a gleam of victory in his eyes.

Phil saw him re-enter the little gate and pass into the house, after which lights were suddenly extinguished and silence surrounded the building.

The boy crossed the street and looked at the building, which could be seen by the lamp that stood near by. It was a large, old-fashioned frame house, which, as far as he knew, contained no other tenant than Felix. Before it grew two trees, whose branches touched the leaf-filled eaves, and almost hid the upper windows.

"Felix feels safe, else he would not have accompanied Simon to the ferry," muttered Phil. "He may be watchful after what has happened, and if I managed to get inside, I might find him guarding the documents with a sleepless eye. However, I am going to see the inside of that old place, if human ingenuity can get me there."

For the boy to determine was to act at once, and a moment later he stood beneath one of the trees, whose trunk he instantly measured with his arms. In a little while he was among the branches, and five minutes later he lay along a stout limb, from which he could reach the window without difficulty.

He was certain that Felix had locked the doors and secured the lower windows, and believed that his only hopes of effecting an entrance lay in the upper ones.

He went to work at once, and at the first trial an exclamation of joy almost leaped from his lips.

The lower sash moved!

Phil Flash had played spotter and spy too long not to realize the dangers attached to the game of burglary, and with all of them before him, he raised the sash a little more, and dropped from the limb into the house.

He was now in a building entirely strange to him, and the darkness of Egypt surrounded him.

"From the shape of this house, it is built exactly like the one we used to live in in New York. They may have been built by the same architect, which would not be very strange, after all. If our old house and this one are alike, I will get along here without much trouble."

The boy detective had his conjectures confirmed when he touched a door exactly where he expected to find one, and a moment later he stood at the head of a stair, whose steps were enveloped in darkness.

The two rooms already explored were almost entirely denuded of furniture, showing that whoever occupied the house kept on the ground floor.

"Felix must be down-stairs," murmured the boy spotter. "What wouldn't Dick Derringer give to strike a lead like this? It is all mine, though—all mine! and I'll gladden Genia's heart before to-morrow night if nothing balks me."

Phil, who had now removed his shoes, crept down the dark stairs with the stealthiness of a cat. He counted the steps until he touched the landing below, where he listened several minutes for the slightest sound.

He was now in that quarter of the house which he believed was occupied by Simon's partner Felix, and he knew from what he had seen of him that he would prove a veritable man-tiger if aroused.

Not a sound indicative of life existing in the old house came to the boy listening at the foot of the stair. He waited ten minutes and then glided to the left, which he believed would take him toward the room where he had witnessed the conference between the two rascals.

The first door, partly open already, yielded without noise, and Phil entered a room dimly lighted by a lamp on a little stand. The boy stood stock still. As his eyes became accustomed to the faint glow, he saw a rude cot in one corner of the room, and soon discovered that it had lately been tenanted. The covers thrown back in much confusion told Phil that it had been hurriedly deserted, and a pair of boots on the floor and a coat tossed over a chair confirmed this belief. Another door leading from the room stood half-way open, as if somebody had made a hasty exit through it, and everything seemed to tell the boy spotter that he had disturbed the slumbers of some one.

Had he roused Felix?

Phil was about to move forward when something moved among the bed-covers, and to his astonishment he saw two little hands lifted above them.

"Heavens—a baby!" ejaculated the boy. "It

cannot be that I have invaded the wrong house."

He could not keep from the bed; something impelled him forward, and he was soon looking down into the face of a little child, whose hands had moved in its sleep.

"A stolen child, I'll bet my head!" exclaimed Phil. "Aha! Felix, maybe I'll spoil more than one shrewd game of yours and Simon's."

He left the babe without disturbing it and passed from the room.

The next moment he stopped, for the first noise that had assailed his ears since entering the house was heard.

It came from some place still ahead, and sounded like the fall of some object to the floor; then the boy thought he heard a human voice.

"What a fool I was to leave them there!" said a voice, which was followed by the step of a stockinged foot. "What if somebody had followed Simon over the ferry and watched the delivery? But nobody did, fortunately, but still I was a fool for not putting everything away. Because you have been unmolested for ten years, Felix, is no reason that you will not be."

Phil drew back and held his breath as the figure of a man in his night-clothes crossed the threshold and entered the room where the baby lay.

He got a momentary glimpse of him and knew that he was the same Felix he had seen in conference with Simon.

"You're as wiry as a tiger, Felix, and I don't want to tackle you to-night," observed the boy.

He waited till he heard the man get back into bed with the babe before he moved another step.

"Now for the treasure!" he exclaimed.

The door next passed he shut tightly and with out noise, and found himself in a room whose interior he revealed by a wax match that struck without sound.

Phil shaded the light with his hand as he made the rounds of the room.

All at once he almost stumbled upon an old desk which looked like a relic from some second-hand furniture store. His eyes brightened when they saw it.

"The treasure-box!" fell from his lips. "Sleep on, Felix, I am only going to relieve you of a few papers which some one else needs more than you."

Of course the desk was locked. Phil would have been surprised to have found it open, but its lock was not going to baffle him.

The keys of course were in Felix's possession, but the boy detective produced a bunch from his own pockets just as his match went out, and he went to work at once. Key after key was inserted into the lock without result, but at last the right one was found and the desk was open!

"I'll explore it in the dark!" the boy spotter muttered and his hand was soon inside.

"Hang me, if it isn't empty! No, here's a drawer and unlocked, too! Ah! here they are! Many thanks, Felix!"

The boy's hand had come in contact with a packet tied with a string, and he had no doubt it was the identical one he had seen Simon deliver to the man who was to sail in the Eudocia to play his part of the game in England.

He jerked the packet from the drawer and quickly transferred it to his bosom, then he shut the desk and carefully locked it again.

"They don't often beat Phil Flash," he ejaculated with a light chuckle when he thought of the man in bed a few yards away. "I won't go back the way I came, for I'd have to pass through your room, Felix. I thought I saw a key in the door yonder, and if I'm not mistaken, it will let me out upon the porch."

With his treasure secured, the boy detective found the door which let him out upon a porch where he once more felt the cool night wind.

His little burglary had proved successful and he walked the street with success stirring his pulses.

"I'd like to know what you're doing with that baby, Felix, but I'll get at that, too, before I've played my last hand," he said, as he hastened to the ferry. "If that house hadn't been built just like our first home, perhaps I wouldn't have fared so well. Do you think you'll take the papers with you in the Eudocia, Felix? ha, ha, ha!"

Exactly one hour from his audacious burglary, Phil Flash, the boy spotter, of New York, stood in a little room, confronted by a young girl whose beautiful face was full of joy and triumph while she watched him.

"I guess I did a neat job to-night, Genia," he said. "It was a little risky, for I invaded a tiger's den, but I got off without feeling the beast's claws."

"But my papers? Did you find them, Phil?" cried the eager girl.

"Look there, Genia!"

As the boy spy spoke, he drew the stolen packet from his bosom and threw it down upon the table.

Genia, the working girl, alighted upon it with a cry of delight.

"I am happy once more!" she exclaimed, breaking the string. "They will not get to work with my documents; they—"

She looked up, her face white as death, and her eyes full of disappointment.

"What is the matter, Genia?" exclaimed Phil.

"My God! these are not my stolen papers. I never saw them before!" was the answer.

"Not your missing title-claim, Genia?—not your papers? Impossible!" cried Phil. "Have I risked my life for a lot of useless documents?"

The girl was speechless. She appeared about to sink unconscious at the boy detective's feet.

In an instant Phil was separating the papers he had purloined.

"I see, I see!" he said. "I did get the wrong ones. May Old Nick take them!" and he grabbed them up and threw them madly across the room. "I won't fail the next time! Wait for me here, Genia. It is a long while till morning."

"Are you going back to that house?" cried the girl, springing to his side. "You are not safe a second there. Let my papers go, Phil. You shall not dare Felix and his revolver again to-night."

The boy found himself firmly held by the girl, who would not let him go.

"I promise you, Genia," he said, "I will not go back there to-night. But think of it. I did one of my best pieces of work for a lot of trash—old papers worth nothing!"

Trash?

Look at the results of your burglary, Phil Flash.

CHAPTER IX.

DROWNING A RAT.

THE reader, I am sure, has not forgotten how the amateur detective, Custer Sharpe, fell into the clutches of Simon Sampson and the beautiful woman who occupied with him the death-trap on Bleecker street.

The young man had played a very bold hand in confronting Simon as he did, and when he found the hands of the two plotters at his throat, he probably wished he had not invaded the trap.

The last thing he saw was the tigerish beauty of the city Cleopatra, and in a second—a flash of memory, as it were—he instinctively compared it to the face of the woman he had seen dead in "Room 21" in Mott street.

Custer Sharpe did not recover consciousness for some time after his severe choking, and then he did not seem to be an inhabitant of the land of the living.

His throat was sore, as if it had been encircled with a collar of hot iron, and his head whirled at times. He was surrounded by pitch darkness, and encompassed, as he very soon found, by smooth walls.

"In what horrible place am I?" exclaimed the young man, when he had felt the walls of his prison and found no avenue of escape. "Let me collect my senses and think what has happened. Ah, yes! I came to old Simon on hunt of certain papers missed by Genia, the needle princess, who is somebody if she can just establish her claim. I found him and let him know in pretty plain terms—too plain, perhaps—that I was on the right trail. Maybe I played my hand too nearly out for the beginning. I was bearing down on Simon when the tigress came. Heavens! what a creature she is! She'd kill Simon if he gave up a paper, she said, and I think she would. She is in the scheme, too, that is very plain to a fellow in my fix. I don't know how long I have been here; I wish I did. I feel hungry, which indicates that some time has passed since they got the upper hand of me. Am I under ground? I wish I knew that."

The young man went to one of the dark corners of his cell and listened. For awhile he could make out no sounds, and then he heard the faraway rattle of vehicles, mere echoes of the wheels that rumbled over the streets of New York.

"Why didn't I drop the girl long ago?" he cried, in no pleasant voice. "She got me into this scrape; she has told me that all my calls were for nothing, and has intimated that she is partial to Phil Flash, the young detective-spy; but, in spite of this, I have kept on. Serves you right, Custer Sharpe. But don't I know that

the papers stolen from the girl are worth more than their weight in rubies? All she needed was her mother's ring, and I'll bet my head that I was on track of it when I was nabbed by Simon and his tigress. Just now it looks as if I won't get to resume my courtship for some time."

"I think you will have to postpone it indefinitely," said a voice that seemed to penetrate the wall from beyond.

The amateur detective started and uttered a cry.

"That was the tigress spoke!" he exclaimed. "I heard her voice once before and I will never forget it. She says I will have to postpone my courtship indefinitely, and I confess that it has that look."

Then he went to the wall and raised his voice. "I heard you!" he said to his unseen enemy. "What is to become of me? Am I to die where I am—starved to death like a dog?"

"I should not be surprised," was the answer accompanied by a laugh that seemed to send a chill along the young man's bones. "Men have died before you, Custer Sharpe."

"But you don't know what I do," he retorted quickly. "My coming to this house was known to certain persons who will not wait long for me."

He took it for granted that he was still in the same house in which he had been taken.

"I'm sorry, Custer; your friends will miss you," was the answer in tones of mock sympathy.

"You refuse to believe me, then?"

"Oh, no; but we can't return you to your friends."

"You are willing to take the consequences—to be hunted down and dragged to light with your infamous plot and crime?"

"Yes."

The young detective was nonplused; the manner of the unseen woman seemed to have deprived him of reply.

"I can't frighten them—that is certain," he said to himself. "I would give the earth, if I had it, to have my hand at that beautiful boa's throat!"

"Very well, then," he continued, addressing the unseen one. "The sooner you and Simon Sampson play your hand out as regards me the sooner the hammer of exposure and vengeance will fall. The Mott street trail has been struck by the best blood-hunters of New York. Go on, my beauty. I know the game you play. It will end disastrously."

The only reply to these words was a sarcastic laugh that sounded strangely in the young man's dark prison, and when it died away he knew that the woman had left her station.

Custer's hunger increased as the hours wore away, and when the rumble of the wagons ceased he knew that night had settled down again over New York.

More than fifty times he had beaten the walls of his prison for an avenue to liberty, and after each attempt he had fallen back dispirited.

"I can endure anything but starvation," he cried. "My God! what a death it must be."

By and by the cell grew perfectly still and the young man fell asleep in one corner.

How long he slept he did not know, when he was startled by a sound he could not describe, and in an instant he was on his feet.

"Was it a dream, or did I not hear something?" he exclaimed. "Merciful heavens! my cell is being flooded with water. This is the work of fiends!"

From a point overhead and beyond his reach a stream of water was pouring into his dungeon. It was cold and sent a chill to his bones. The sound was so full of doom that the young detective felt his senses swim.

The floor was already covered, and at the rate the water was falling, it would soon cover everything in the place.

The horrors of the death that threatened Custer Sharpe almost drove him mad. He had, indeed, fallen into the power of devils incarnate.

Was there no escape?

He thought of all the adventures he had ever heard of; he recalled the tortures and the marvelous escapes of prisoners in the old world, but among them all he could think of no situation like his.

He drew off his coat and tried to reach the spout, but in vain. It continued to rain down upon him a watery destruction, the end of which drew nearer and nearer.

He then tried to calculate how long a time would elapse before the water would reach his chin if he stood erect, but the result was not satisfactory, so he gave up in disgust.

All at once he felt the ground give way under

his feet. The water standing upon it had softened it, and his weight had caused it to settle.

"Good!" he cried. "Here's a hope at any rate. If the ground will absorb the water as fast as it falls there will be a chance for Custer Sharpe!"

He went to work with his hands and dug quite a pit in the corner. After awhile he listened, and heard the water trickle down its sides into the lower earth which appeared to be gravel.

"The death-trap is not filling any!" he said. "The ground takes the water. I am saved from drowning, but I shall starve to death!"

All through that terrible night which seemed without an end Custer Sharpe stood in his dungeon and listened to the ceaseless fall of water from the unseen spout overhead. The air was cold, but he did not mind it; he even laughed like a maniac when he heard the earth drinking in the water sent to drown him.

The rumbling of the wagons told him when day had come again, and with the first sounds of them the water ceased.

"They think they have finished the rat!" he laughed. "If they will come here to investigate, they will find the hungriest rodent they ever saw. But they will not come; they think the deed accomplished."

By the time the young man had finished his last sentence, he heard a trap open overhead. He could see nothing, but he knew some one was there.

"We've drowned out the rat, sure enough!" said a voice, the sound of which almost drew an exclamation from the detective. "By Jehu! they don't fare well who play against Simon Sampson's great hand. No, siree!"

The trap closed and the voice died away.

"So it was your voice, Simon, my gamester!" grated Custer Sharpe, clinching his hand at the dark ceiling overhead. "If fortune will show me a way out of this trap, I will exhibit a hand that will astonish Simon and his tigress. I wonder how my natural cistern is getting along?"

Custer went to the corner where the gravelly earth had fortunately absorbed the water. He did not expect to find much of a hole, but all at once, to his surprise, he fell downward, and landed some distance below the surface.

He put his hand out to feel his whereabouts, and felt the side of the pit crumble at his touch.

"I can dig my way out of this," he cried, suddenly taking hope. "If I had only food to sustain me, I would make my escape but a question of time."

He found a long, sharp stone, and went to work with it with the fury of a madman. Wherever he struck, the ground crumbled; he made prodigious headway.

But he had more than the ground to contend with; he had to fight the bitterest of foes—hunger. It attacked him like a wolf; but he kept on.

At last he fell back, out of breath.

"This is the end. I am to die here!" he groaned. "I'd give my hopes of Heaven for a loaf of bread!"

All was then silent in the little tunnel the detective had made.

Early the next morning, the newsboys in certain parts of the city were heard to cry:

"Here's your mornin' Sun! All about the crazy man found under the house on Bleeker street!"

One of the purchasers of the paper was a boy whose sharp eyes soon found the paragraph, and when he had read it he threw the journal away, and started off at a gait that soon took him many squares.

The boy was Phil Flash, the spotter.

CHAPTER X.

WANTED A FINGER.

THE boy detective was not long in reaching the branch hospital to which the man found under the Bleeker street house had been moved.

He soon learned that the patient was then unconscious under the influence of opiates, and while he waited for permission to see him, he was told that the authorities had found no clew to the man's identity.

Phil had Dick Derringer uppermost in his mind, and he was very anxious to get a look at the mad man. He had learned that he was found in an abandoned cellar of a house which was near Simon Sampson's abode, and he more than half believed that his friend Dick had fallen into the plotter's power.

At last he was conducted to the little cell where the strange patient lay.

"This is the man, my boy," said the doctor in

charge, as Phil halted by the cot occupied by a young man with emaciated features and a wild look. "We have yet been unable to establish his identity, and hope you can do so."

The boy detective looked down into the face for some time then slowly shook his head.

"He isn't the man I thought he might be," he said.

"Who was that?"

"A friend of mine."

"There was nothing on his person by which he could be recognized," continued the doctor. "He was nearly starved when found, and hunger and fear turned his brain."

"Is it a serious case?" asked Phil.

"Oh, we expect to bring him through with rest and proper attention," was the reply.

"When was he found?"

"About twelve o'clock last night. He had evidently tunneled into the old cellar from somewhere."

"Ah! wasn't the tunnel followed up?"

"It was, but a fire interrupted the work."

"A fire?" echoed Phil.

"The burning of a house on Bleeker street near the place where our patient was found put an end to the work of following the tunnel. It was unfortunate. As it is, we will have to wait till he recovers his reason; then the mystery may be cleared up."

Phil turned away with a parting look at the cot.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed suddenly turning back. "I think I have a grip on him now."

"I hope you have," said the surgeon.

The boy stepped to the bed and looked closely at the strange patient.

"This man," he said, "is Custer Sharpe, a fellow who plays detective sometimes."

The doctor repeated the name.

"Are you sure of it?" he asked.

"I know it! I see it plainly now. His pinched features deceived me, but now all is clear."

The hospital patient was wide awake, but his eyes had a wild stare which seemed to increase as they regarded the boy detective.

All at once Phil bent over the little cot and spoke the amateur detective's name. The only response was a slight start.

"When he gets right in his head again he will tell you that he is Custer Sharpe," continued the boy to the doctor. "I'd like to know how he came into that old cellar. I will be back here this afternoon to see how he is. Should he come around, all right, before that time, don't tell him that Phil Flash has been here."

A moment later the boy detective was on the street again.

"I'll take up the thread myself," he said. "I'll bet my head that Custer went from Genia's presence to the place where he thought her missing papers were, but he fell into some kind of a trap. Ah! here is Bleeker street. I'll take a look at your den by daylight, Simon."

The boy soon reached the vicinity of the man-trap in which he had had an experience never to be forgotten and a few moments later an exclamation of astonishment fell from his lips.

"The old trap has fed the fire!" he cried; and, sure enough, before him lay the ruins of the house lately occupied by Simon Sampson and the city Cleopatra.

Little columns of smoke still rose above the blackened heaps of logs and weather boarding, and here and there a number of poor people were pulling away pieces for fire-wood.

"Simon and his tigress will give me another chase," Phil murmured. "Ten chances to one that they put the match to the old crib. The house burned shortly after midnight and near the time when Custer Sharpe was discovered in the cellar! I can't help putting the two events together."

Phil made a few inquiries about the fire among the people who inhabited that quarter, but he could learn nothing about Simon Sampson and his partner. Nobody was seen to issue from the old house while it was in flames, and the people were of the opinion that it was not inhabited at that time.

"Burned to cover up something!" decided the boy as he turned away. "I am not going to quit this case till I am at the end of it. I have to find the hand that killed the woman on Mott street and the one that took Genia's title claim. I know that hand, I think. I begin to see through the motive that prompted the crimes. My friend Dick Derringer may be on the trail, but I haven't time to hunt him up. I am glad that the crazy man in the hospital ward is not Richard. Off I am again!"

If Phil had looked closely over his shoulder at that time he might have seen that he was being

watched by a well-built man with an iron-gray beard, and a pair of keen eyes. This individual had seen Phil approach the fire, and not for a moment had he taken his eyes from him.

When Phil started off he was stealthily followed by this man, but at a respectful distance.

"The young rat has come back," muttered the man. "He will soon be caught by another trap from which there will be no escape. Move along, boy, and give me a spirited race. I don't like a slow trail."

Phil led his watcher a number of squares before he dodged into a doctor's office much to the man's surprise.

"What on earth does he want in there?" exclaimed the shadower, and then he took up a position from which he could see the boy emerge.

Phil passed into the well-furnished private room of the city doctor, and found a good-looking, middle-aged man alone at his desk.

"Hello!" is it you, my boy?" exclaimed the doctor.

"It's nobody else," assured Phil.

"You don't come often."

"Only on business."

"Well, I am able to report that the wounded man whom you helped to my office a few weeks ago is out again."

"That is good, but I didn't come to inquire about him, doctor."

"Go ahead, then."

"I want to know, doctor, if you can get me a human finger if I should want one?" and the boy spoke with a seriousness that made Doctor Lapins open his eyes.

"That's a strange demand, Philip," he exclaimed.

"Of course it is, but I was never more in earnest. I may want a human finger before long. You have an *entree* to hospitals and medical colleges, and I know of no doctor who would be more likely to oblige me. I want a woman's finger."

"Stranger yet. I could get you the hand as well."

"But I don't want a hand!" protested the boy positively. "I only want to know now if you can get me the finger when I need it."

"I am always at your service, Philip," declared the doctor with a smile as he patted the boy detective on the shoulder. "When you want that finger give me a day's notice, and you shall be accommodated."

"A thousand thanks, doctor!" returned Phil. "Oh, did you read about the man found in the Bleecker street cellar last night?"

"I have just finished the account."

"Well, what do you think of his chances?"

"Oh, he'll come out all right," was the reply.

"Will he be able to recall his adventures?"

"Most assuredly."

"That is all I want to know. No charge for information, eh, doctor? Don't forget the finger business. I'll draw on you before long, I think. Good-day!"

The boy investigator bounded from the office and went down the street with an expression of satisfaction on his face. Of course he was followed again by the man with the iron-gray beard, and was seen to enter a building which was known to be tenanted by a number of women who plied the needle for a living.

"He still clings to the needle girl, I see," murmured the man as he turned away. "I can afford to leave him there for awhile. I suspect that he called at the doctor's to get something for the girl who works late and gets nervous headaches. I wonder if she has found her papers? I guess not yet, and my opinion is, Miss Genia Hale, that you will never see them again."

The man was walking past the building to which he had tracked the boy when he was brushed by a person who looked down into his face significantly as he passed.

Not a word was spoken by either of the men until both were seated at a table in a saloon and in the corner most secure from observation.

"Well, Felix, what brought you over the river this morning?" asked the boy detective's tracker.

"I have met with a loss. The papers—"

"Heavens! not *our* papers!" interrupted the other clutching Felix's arm. "Not the title claims to the big estate across the pond?"

"No! don't be a fool, Simon," was the answer and Felix showed his teeth like hyena. "I had papers of my own which I did not want to lose. They were stolen from my desk night before last. I was a fool for not making aches of them long ago! Simon, I've got to hide till the Eudocia sails or go before her. Where is Cleo?"

"Where we can lay our hands on her when wanted."

"And the boy?"

"Hang the boy!" was the rejoinder. "I have just tracked the young fox to one of his haunts. He is again playing some kind of a game against us."

"You were to fix him, you know."

"And I will!" and the hand of Simon Sampson descended upon the table. "Is there a ship that sails before the Eudocia?"

"Yes; the Wyoming, day after to-morrow."

"Good! I'll engage passage for you and Cleo right away. Stephen Slack and sister; cabin passage first-class fare, you know."

Felix was silent for a moment, then all at once he touched Simon's arm and whispered:

"I don't like the idea of that boy being at work. He is one of the foxes in New York."

"Don't let him bother you, Felix. To-morrow the fox will be worth nothing but the price of his skin. If you fear the papers stolen from you are going to get you into trouble, hide yourself till Stephen Slack and his sister are to sail. You know the game that is to be played in England. The woman who died in Mott street is resurrected in Cleo, our beautiful tool, and the ring and the title-papers prove everything we want. It is my biggest game, Felix, and nothing on earth can prevent us from playing it through successfully."

"I fear only the boy now."

"And the police, eh?" laughed Simon.

"I've looked out for them all my life," was the answer, with another hyena grin. "I'll hunt my new hiding-place and wait for your report. Once on the water, the game is ours!"

CHAPTER XI.

DERRINGER TURNS UP.

SIMON SAMPSON went straight from the beer saloon to the office of the steamship company, where he purchased two tickets for Liverpool in the Wyoming, which was to sail within three days.

As he left the office he was seen by a man who appeared there by the merest accident, but who from the first regarded Simon with a great deal of interest.

Instead of following Simon himself, he called a boy who loitered near and told him to perform that office; then, as the boy bounded off, he walked up to the desk where Simon had just made his purchases.

"You have just had a customer, I see," he said to the agent.

The agent looked over his gold-rimmed glasses and seemed to wonder at the questioner's impudence.

"Well, yes; we have them every day," he said at last.

"Is he going to sail?"

"I do not know whether I should answer you," was the reply. "I do not recognize in you a person competent to ask such questions, and you will pardon me if—"

"What! don't you know me?" exclaimed the questioner, with a laugh.

"Dick Derringer!"

"At your service, Ford. Now you will give me a little information, won't you?"

"All I can," was the reply.

"Go ahead."

"Well, the man who just left the office purchased two tickets for Liverpool in the Wyoming for Stephen Slack and sister."

"Aha! And he did not mention his own name?"

"Oh, yes! It came in incidentally—David Drane, I believe."

The Broadway detective gave vent to a prolonged whistle before he spoke.

"Pretty clever, Simon; pretty clever!" he exclaimed. "So Stephen Slack and sister are going to take passage in the Wyoming, day after to-morrow?"

As he finished, the detective took up a city Directory, and ran his finger up and down the many columns of S's.

"Of course Mr. Stephen Slack is not a resident of the city," he said with a smile. "And I happen to know that David Drane is my old fox Simon Sampson, sailing under new colors. I should think that the game was pretty well along by this time. We will see about the proposed sailing."

"Are you going to cheat the Wyoming out of two cabin passengers?" asked the agent.

"That depends," laughed the detective. "At any rate you will not be asked to refund the money paid for the tickets, Ford. David Drane is on the make, but he will never bring the tickets back here for redemption."

"You must be working up a case."

The Broadway detective smiled knowingly, and hastily excusing himself, darted from the office and hurried down-town.

He went to the little room in which we introduced him to the reader in the first chapter of our romance, and waited patiently for some one.

By and by the boy he had put on Simon Sampson's track came in.

"Did you follow that man?" asked Dick quietly, as if the question was the least of unimportant things.

"Yes."

"Well?"

"He went in at No. — Houston street. I saw the face of a woman at the window. Brush my boots! Richard, if she wasn't superior to any chromo I ever ran afoul of!"

"You have done well, Gid, my boy. One of these days I'll get you on the force, see if I don't."

The boy smiled, accepted the dollar tossed at him by the detective, and went out.

"Houston street, eh?" ejaculated Derringer.

"I wonder if Stephen Slack is there as well as his 'sister'? Simon is not the man to risk his life on the ocean; he is going to send his Jersey City pal after the prize, while he takes care of affairs at home. Thus far I have worked the Mott street mystery pretty well. It is a deeper game than it seemed at the outset. Phil Flash is working the same case on his own hook, wondering all the time, no doubt, what has become of me. One of these days I will startle him with the results of my trail. I don't like to mystify the clever fellow about myself, but I'll make up for it by and by."

A few moments later Richard Derringer put on his hat, assumed the disguise of a full black beard, and went out.

Meanwhile, Simon Sampson, as David Drane, had wasted a good deal of time between the ship ticket-office and the house on Houston street, to which Gid, the boy shadower, had tracked him. He had stopped several times, as if he was in no hurry to get to his destination, and led Gid a dreary chase.

When he reached the house he entered without ringing, and was confronted by a magnificent-looking woman.

"The programme is changed," said Simon.

"You sail on the Wyoming day after to-morrow. I have just purchased the tickets."

A look of astonishment was instantly seen in the woman's eyes.

"What means this?" she cried.

"Felix must go soon."

"Where is Felix?"

"He will be here to-night."

"Well, if it must be so, I submit. Felix has all the papers? He knows what to do?"

"He understands the whole case," said Simon.

"He must make no poor play," the woman went on. "Do I really look like Viola Estrange?"

She drew her fine figure to its true height, and struck an attitude that made Simon's eyes glisten.

"If her brother were alive he would recognize you," he exclaimed. "Put the ring on your finger, and let me see what a difference it makes."

"I cannot. You forget that you intrusted it to Felix."

"So I did. Very well; you look well enough without it."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Simon. But am I to remain cooped up here till the Wyoming sails?"

"You must, for our good. When you come back from England, Cleo, you will dazzle this city as the possessor of the famous estate that has wanted an heir so long."

"Won't I!" laughed the woman. "Isn't this the deepest game you ever played, Simon?"

"If not the deepest, the biggest and best," was the reply.

"Did you ever play surgeon before?" and the woman came forward and suddenly caught Simon's arm. "Did you ever leave a dead woman behind you—a woman with a missing finger?"

"Hush!" cried Simon, suddenly turning a trifle paler and throwing a hasty glance toward the door.

"Why, you start at your own shadow!" laughed Cleo. "I'm too old a hand for that, and I'm a woman, Simon. Do you really think that Custer Sharpe found one of your buttons in the room, as he said he did?"

"I don't know."

"Did you miss one?"

Simon Sampson was silent for a moment.

"I missed one, but it was before that night, I think," he answered, when the woman's eyes forced him to say something.

"What was your last news from Custer Sharpe?"

"He is still in the insane ward at the hospital."

"Any hopes for him?"

"I don't know."

"If he gets well, Simon, aren't you afraid that he'll block this little game of ours?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"He will not be a stumbling-block long," grated the plotter. "The next time he will not be consigned to a cellar that will not hold water."

"I leave that to you, Simon," said Cleo. "You must look out for breakers. Remember the boy who got out of our trap."

"Hang the boy!" exclaimed Simon. "He will never know that the Wyoming sails. I have tracked the young fox down, and know just where to find him. I'll wager my head, which still sits comfortably on my shoulders, that he'll find certain hands at his throat to-night!"

The face of the speaker was positively ferocious while he spoke, and Cleo the adventuress saw him clench his sallow hands, on one of which was a scar that looked like a red cross—the marked hand once seen and well remembered, as we know, by Phil, the young spotter.

When he finished he glanced at his watch and noted the hour with a slight start.

"I will send Felix here to-night and you can talk over the game you are to play in England," he went on.

"You will not come yourself?"

"Not if I get after that young fox, who must be caught."

"Be careful, Simon, that the young fox, as you call him, does not catch you."

Simon Sampson laughed, but not with his usual gusto. He walked to the door and turned to Cleo as he opened it.

"I forgot the steamship tickets; here they are," he said, tossing her a small packet. "You will turn them over to Felix when he comes."

"There are no tickets here," said Cleo, opening the paper and displaying a package covered with a druggist's label on which was printed the skull and cross-bones device and underneath the word "Poison!"

"What is this, Simon?" continued the woman. "Do you always carry death in your pocket?"

With a strange ejaculation, Simon sprang forward and colored deeply as he snatched the package from Cleo's hands.

"I gave you the wrong paper, sure enough," he said. "Here are the tickets. Turn them over to Felix when he comes." And without another word he turned suddenly and rushed from the house.

"That packet of poison means something," said the beautiful adventuress as she watched Simon a moment from the window. "Has he purchased it to use on himself if the officers bound him too closely? He is playing a desperate game for big money, and I am his accomplice. Without me the game cannot be won. I won't mention this incident to Felix when he comes, but I would like to know what Simon means to do with that poison."

The time was near at hand for the woman to know.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAIL OF THE BUTTON.

TRUE to his promise, Phil Flash presented himself at the hospital in the afternoon, and made inquiries after Custer Sharpe in whom he seemed to take great interest.

He was told by the doctors in charge of the young man that he had a few lucid intervals during which he maintained a strange silence about his adventures underground.

"Mebbe the right person hasn't pumped him, doctor," said the boy. "Is he all right now?"

"I believe he is."

"May I try my hand?"

"Yes; walk in."

A moment later Phil walked into the little apartment where the amateur detective occupied a reclining chair. His features still bore traces of his terrible treatment by Simon Sampson and his beautiful pard, and his eyes had a singular look.

The boy detective had been requested to be left alone with Custer, and when the door closed softly behind him he found that his request had been attended to.

"How are you now?" asked Phil, as he came forward.

In an instant the eyes of the sewing-girl's persecutor were fastened upon him.

"You here?" he almost hissed, grating his teeth behind the last word. "I don't want to see you now, Phil Flash, and you ought to know it."

"We ought to be friends," said Phil, undismayed; "we have suffered in the same den, and at the hands of the same persons."

"What?" cried Custer, his look suddenly softening. "Do you mean to say that you have felt their hands at your throat?"

"That I do. If that does not make us friends it should not prevent us from working together to spoil the game they are playing."

Custer Sharpe eyed the boy several minutes before he spoke again.

"Friends we can never be. Mark, I tell you that," he said, laying his hand on Phil's arm.

"I will not trouble myself to tell you why; perhaps you know. The doctors tell me that I cannot be moved for days. My case is a singular one. I am sane now; in an hour I may be mad again. Is it an urgent case?"

"Yes; it is very urgent," said Phil. "A part of the gang is to sail for England in a few days. You went to Simon's den for a purpose?"

"I did. It was to recover Genia's papers."

"I know where they are. I've run them down," said Phil.

"I would rather have found them myself," said Custer Sharpe, frankly. "But never mind."

"How were you going to get them from Simon, providing you found them in his possession?"

"That is a secret," said the young detective, drawing back.

"Very well; keep it, then," was the reply, in an indifferent manner. "If the gang escapes you shall be blamed, Custer Sharpe. I will go back to the trail myself. I thought you wanted your tormentors run down; but I see you don't care. Good-day."

"Hold on!" cried Custer, seeing Phil moving off, and afraid he would lose him. "Come back here and I'll tell you."

The boy spotter turned back and seated himself beside the patient's chair.

"I went to the room on Mott street as soon as I heard of Viola Estrange's murder," said Custer. "I was aware that several detectives, among them Richard Derringer, had been there before me. I had no idea then that I would find any clew to the crime, but I met with startling success. If Dick and his associates searched the apartment with any thoroughness they overlooked one object—a peculiar button which fortune put into my hands. You recollect that the dead woman had one finger missing when discovered, and it was plain that the finger had been amputated to secure a ring which would not come off by any other means. I then began to put certain things together. I knew that the title papers prized so highly by Genia Hale made mention of a ring which would establish the claim of her mother to a certain large estate in England, and when Genia's papers were stolen, I said that the hand that slew the woman in Mott street stole her title. Don't you see, Phil Flash?"

"It is plain to me," said the boy detective. "But how did you come to fasten on Simon Sampson?"

"By the button. It happened that I knew Simon," continued Custer Sharpe, "and just two days before the discovery of the crime I noticed him and the peculiar buttons that adorned his coat. The moment I found the button in Viola Estrange's room I located its owner beyond question. I knew I had Simon Sampson in my hands. Armed with this clew I went to his Bleeker street house and let him know something about the damning testimony I had secured. I offered the button for Genia's papers, and I verily believe I would have succeeded if the city Cleopatra had not interfered with her infamous claws."

"Did you have the button on your person at the time of your visit?" asked Phil quickly.

"Fortunately I did not."

"Where is it now?"

"Under lock and key at my boarding-house."

"Are you certain it is there?"

"Why not?" asked the amateur detective starting in his surprise.

"You may have carried with you to Simon's house that night a paper that gave a clew to your lodgings."

"By heavens! I did!" exclaimed Custer Sharpe turning a shade paler. "I had my note-book with me and I was robbed of everything while unconscious. What if Simon had got possession of the button again?"

Phil did not seem to be the least excited.

"Give me your number and I will see at once," he said. "It may not be as bad as it seems."

Custer instantly complied with the request, and the boy detective noted the address down.

"I will take up the trail of that button right away," he said. "Be of good cheer, Custer. You will yet have the pleasure of seeing this infamous set of money-sharks behind the bars."

The shades of night were falling once more over the city when the young spotter emerged from the hospital armed with Custer Sharpe's address and a letter from him to his landlady to admit him to his rooms. As it was a long distance Phil called a cab and was driven to the house, a little affair, on a quiet street and presided over by a pleasant lady who took a great deal of interest in her somewhat flash boarder.

When Phil presented his letter the woman uttered a cry of astonishment.

"This is the second letter of the kind I have received from him," she said.

"Who brought the other?" asked the boy.

"A rather heavily-set good-looking man of fifty. The letter was signed by Custer, and said the gentleman was his friend, and that he had been sent to bring him something from his room."

"Did you keep the letter?"

"No; the man was very careful to keep it himself."

"I fear I am too late," muttered Phil. "I'll bet my head that Simon Sampson has been here."

However, without betraying any agitation, he asked to be conducted to Custer's room where he was left alone and where he went to work at once.

Before quitting the hospital patient he had made sure of the location of the button, and he was not long picking the drawer in which Custer Sharpe had placed it wrapped in paper and carefully laid away.

"Just as I expected—the button is gone!" exclaimed Phil. "You are a shrewd one, Simon—too shrewd for this world. We'll have to translate you to another."

The button was indeed gone, and the keen eyes of detective Phil saw evidences that the drawer had been searched before his coming.

He looked no further but rejoined Custer's landlady and obtained the exact time of the man's visit.

"I am going to run this button down," he said to himself. "This is a new trail but I'll make it a very brief one. Let me see. I'll first locate Simon, and then I'll give Doctor Lapins an order for a finger."

Phil did not see the man who saw him emerge from Custer Sharpe's boarding house.

"I guess you didn't find it, my young reynard!" laughed this person who followed Phil toward the first corner where stood a carriage waiting apparently for some one.

The driver occupied his usual position above the wheels and a man stood at the lamp-post with his hat drawn over his eyes.

As Phil neared the corner the man behind him hurried forward and suddenly raised his hand in the manner of a signal.

All at once the fellow at the lamp-post started into active life. The boy spotter was within arm's reach.

Suddenly Phil was pounced upon as if the strange man was a panther, and before he could resist, the man behind him had come up and he felt another pair of arms about him.

"Not a cry, my young fox!" was spoken at his ear.

The next instant the cab door was jerked open and Phil was thrown inside to be followed in a second by the men. The boy's face had been covered with a handkerchief drawn very close, and he was almost suffocated when the horses started and the vehicle rattled away.

"In another trap," flashed across the boy spotter's mind. "This is because I started out upon the trail of the button."

His capture did not seem to occupy five seconds, and while he was being carried over the streets he guessed that he had fallen into the hands of Simon and Felix.

At last the carriage stopped and one of the men got out. He was now alone with the other, but which one?

"You are still playing your cards, I see," suddenly said the man; "but it is a bad hand you hold to-night my boy."

"We will see when it has been played out," said the boy.

"Ha! then you will see very soon!" was the reply, followed by a low chuckle of delight, and the boy spotter knew that his companion was the man with the marked hand.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CITY CLEOPATRA.

THE man who left the cab at a certain place was Felix and he walked two squares and a half until he reached the house occupied by Cleo the city Cleopatra as Phil Flash had often called Simon's female pard.

He was immediately admitted, and the next moment he was confronted by the brilliant woman who appeared more beautiful than ever as she stood in the lamp-light and called him Felix.

"Simon has told you, I suppose, that we are to sail in the Wyoming?" she said.

"Yes. Does the time suit you?"

"Anything suits me," was the quick reply, accompanied by a peculiar smile. "Have you arranged the game?"

"There is not much to arrange," said Felix.

"We are to prove by certain papers and a ring now in our possession that you are the woman known for a while in this city as Viota Estrange. That will not be hard to do. I will coach you going over in the ship. You are to say that the daughter born before leaving England died soon after your arrival in New York. Her name was Edna as the church register in a certain parish will show. You look like that child's mother. The first time Simon saw you he told me he had struck a gold mine, and," with a laugh, "I guess he has."

The woman showed her beautiful teeth and waited for Felix to go on.

"The woman called Viota Estrange had an eventful life of it," he proceeded. "She had a husband from whose brutality she had to flee. She lost her child in New York, and I suspect the husband, now dead, knew where it went."

"We all know now," said Cleo.

Felix nodded.

"Viota Estrange knew that she was the heir to the estate we are after, but she hated Simon. She fell in with him soon after her arrival here, and he got her story from her by piecemeal. Then Simon tried to get her to let him play her for the estate, but she used to say that she had nothing pleasant by which to remember England, and that while she lived she would never touch a penny of the money. She hunted for her child up to the last moment, but never found a clew. Simon, shrewd fox that he is, was more successful. After all, he had to resort to cold work."

"Yes; after all, he had to commit murder."

Cool as Felix was, the word seemed to send a shudder of aversion through his frame.

"He couldn't get the ring any other way, and we had to have it," he said, gaining control of himself. "Do you disapprove of his action, Cleo?"

"I hate murder," the woman said. "There is something so horrible about it, and then to cut the finger off afterward!"

"Simon studied surgery once, and his knowledge of it came into play then," laughed Felix. "Those who saw it say it was a neat job, and that is how some of the papers got the idea that a medical student did the deed. Ha, ha! they were completely hoodwinked!"

Cleo looked at the laughing man for a moment, and then turned away.

"You don't like it, I see; that's certain. And yet, Simon says that you helped to choke Custer Sharpe, the man who had the button," he said, suddenly becoming serious.

She whirled upon him like a tiger struck with an Arab spear.

"Yes, I did help choke him," she said, and she suddenly leaned toward Felix, forcing him back as if a red-hot iron had been thrust into his face. "We are all in the same boat, Felix—you, Simon and Cleo! I have sold myself, body and soul, to this game for gold. I need money. I will do almost anything for it. You know that without being told here. Simon found me when I was on the eve of suicide. I had been hissed from the boards, and was about to go to the river. He saw my, to him, fortunate resemblance to Viota Estrange, and had but to show me the chance to have me embrace it. I am to go to England and swear to an infamous lie. I am to declare that I am Julia Esmond, the mother of Edna, when I never bore a child, nor saw the real Julia Esmond. I am to do this, carrying in my breast the knowledge of a foul crime that shocked even wicked New York—all this for money! Don't you think I must be a demoness to do all this?"

"I'm no judge," said Felix.

"No, you don't want to be," was the answer.

"What if I should go to the police and give the whole infamous plot away? What if I should expose you and Simon, saying that I have been an unwilling accomplice?"

Felix looked with amazement into the face of the speaker, then leaned back in his chair and tried to laugh with indifference.

"No danger of that, Cleo," he exclaimed. "We are, as you say, all in the same boat. When we get the old English estate in our hands we'll be lords of creation."

"Simon and you—yes; but what will I be?"

"We'll marry you off so splendidly that you'll be countess of something or other."

There was no answer.

With a singular look Cleo left her chair and walked to a bureau that stood against the wall.

Felix saw her open one of the drawers and fumble in it for a moment.

All at once she turned toward him, and he saw a silver-mounted revolver in her hand.

"In Heaven's name, what do you mean to do with that?" he cried, leaving his chair and starting forward; but she waved him back.

"Stand off, Felix, and listen to me," she said.

The white-faced accomplice stood spellbound in the middle of the room.

"After success, what?" she went on. "We go to England; we swear to a lie to get the money of a woman already poisoned for it, and of a child robbed of her birthright; we live well for awhile, and then, with the last shilling gone, we go back to more crime."

"Simon never told me you took such freaks," said Felix.

"He has no conscience himself; he thinks I have none," cried Cleo.

"Oh! play the game through, Cleo," he went on, his old courage coming back. "It will always be wealth and position—never poverty again. There can be no detection. The best detectives in the city have given up the trail, and Simon has just performed a *coup* that makes safety assured."

All the time Felix was gliding toward the woman with the stealthiness of the mountain cat. She did not perceive his advances, and all at once he bounded forward and had the revolver in his hand before she could restrain him.

"Come! no side-plays now," he said sternly.

"Remember that we have united our fortunes, Cleo. The game is just ahead. You and I are to play the last card in merry England. I will make an excellent actress out of you; but you are that already. Aha! you have a sideboard. It is Simon's thoughtfulness."

He walked to a small cupboard in the wall, and displayed several shelves containing bottles and glasses. Filling one glass, he turned and presented it to the city Cleopatra, who eyed it for a moment, and then snatched it from his hand.

"There's a viper at the bottom, Felix, but I've tried its sting before!" she exclaimed, and the next moment the glass was handed back empty.

The effect of the wine was instantaneous. Cleo walked over to where Felix was, and placing her shapely hands on his shoulders, laughed in his face.

"We'll go to the end of the game, Felix!" she exclaimed. "I will never weaken again."

"Jehui! what a woman!" ejaculated the man, who drew back from the window of the house, through the shutters of which he had witnessed the scene just enacted. "Gid, my new shadow, made no mistake when he tracked Simon to this house. There isn't another woman like the one in there in all this city. She will never stop again, but will go to the end of this gold game with a steady step. I know you both now, and I will see whether Stephen Slack and sister sail in the Wyoming."

The man got down into the light of the next lamp, but did not stop. His eyes twinkled. It was Dick Derringer.

CHAPTER XIV.

A GOOD NIGHT'S WORK.

LET us go back to Phil Flash.

The close carriage or cab that carried him at a rapid rate over the streets of New York did not come to a final halt until it had traversed a number of squares.

Before it stopped a large silk handkerchief was suddenly thrown over the boy's face, and he found himself blindfolded in the twinkling of an eye. His hands had already been pinioned to his side by a strong rubber band which had been thrown over his head, and forced downward, which told him that Simon Sampson had laid a careful trap for him.

When the cab came to a stand-still, Phil was seized, and lifted suddenly out. Two men did this action, the driver probably helping Simon.

Of course, being completely blindfolded, the

boy spotter could not see his surroundings, but certain odors told him that he had left the street, and was probably in an alley.

This was indeed the truth. The cab had halted alongside a brick building which occupied one side of the alley's mouth, and one of the men unlocked a rather narrow door and Phil was carried across the threshold.

At the same time a lithe little figure jumped to the ground from behind the cab, and crouched in the dense shadow of the old house.

The door that opened to receive detective Phil closed soon, and the driver, mounting quickly to his box, drove off at a rapid gait.

Phil was once more between four walls, and in the clutches of a man who knew no mercy in his rage.

"We'll see who plays the winning hand," said a voice in the dense darkness. "Don't you know, Philip Flash, that you have been following the most unfortunate trail of your life?"

At the same time a hand clutched the boy's wrist and he could imagine Simon Sampson leaning forward with one of his devilish leers.

A minute later the grasp was suddenly withdrawn, and before Phil could answer the thug he heard a door open and shut and knew that he was again alone.

"Are they to finish me here?" exclaimed Phil when he had made the rounds of his prison, and came back to the starting-point. "No! Simon Sampson is not going to play his big game through! I have set out to find the murderer of Viota Estrange and I have found him. I know the motive that prompted the deed, and I know, too, that the marked hand that committed it took Genia's title papers. But, here I am, surrounded by walls that yield not when I press them. Am I to be drowned out in darkness as Custer Sharpe was? The ground here might not yield for me as it did for him!"

While Phil talked thus the imp who had ridden behind the cab to the alley came up to the door and felt the keyhole with his fingers. After awhile he took something from his pocket and pressed it into the little aperture.

"I'll see what I can do for him, anyhow," murmured the worker on the outside. "Fortunately Red Jimmy's nest isn't far from here. If I catch the kid at home, I may be able to do something."

Once out on the street and in the light of a lamp the speaker turned out to be a boy about sixteen, rather small for his age, but quick and bright-eyed.

He kept down the street for some distance, and then turned into an alley similar to the one just left.

Five minutes later he was at the rear door of a poor house, and when it opened he slid in like a weasel.

"Hello, imp! what do you want?" asked the old woman who had admitted him as she held a lamp close to his face.

"I want Jimmy."

"Jimmy isn't in."

"Then I want to take a squint at his pickers."

The eyes of the woman instantly brightened. "Is it a job you have on hand?" she cried, clutching the lad's arm. "Have you found a new lay for Red Jimmy's pickers?"

"No difference what I've found," was the answer. "What is to be done must be done right away. If Jimmy's pickers won't help me, then I'll give the fleece to the wolf Billy."

"Never to that man!" cried the woman.

"Come, I'll show you the pickers," and the boy, to his delight, was led across the room into another, where a chest was opened, displaying a lot of keys and burglar implements.

"Help yourself," continued the woman, "and, mind you that you take the right ones."

The boy took from his pocket a waxen impression of a lock, and with it in one hand, hunted among the keys while the woman held the light over his head.

After awhile he selected two which seemed to suit him, and with them safely put away in an inner pocket, he was let out by the woman, who admonished him to be very careful and to secure all the swag possible.

Twenty minutes later Detective Phil, in the darkness of his prison, heard a key in the lock between him and the alley, and a great bound took him to the door.

Who could be out there?

For a few moments a key was manipulated in the lock, when it was withdrawn and another one was inserted.

Phil held his breath.

All at once the lock-bolt shot back and the next moment the door was opened.

"Phil?" said a low voice.

"Here!" was the response, and the boy spotter stepped out before he could be restrained.

"Wait till I lock the door," was the response.

The young spotter had already noticed that his deliverer was a boy much smaller than himself, and he was curious to know who he was.

"Now let us get out of this carefully," continued Phil's rescuer. "We don't want the old fox, Simon, to find us here."

The two boys started off down the alley.

"Who are you?" cried Phil, unable to restrain his curiosity.

"Me? Oh, I'm Gid Gobright," was the reply, with a laugh. "They jist call me Gid where I'm best known. I've done a little shadow work lately for Dick Derringer whom you may know."

"Of course I know him!" exclaimed Phil. "Is he still on the trail?"

"Ah! and he's going to play a mighty big card soon, too!" declared Gid. "I happened to be near when they grabbed you and chucked you into the cab. I knew Simon on sight for I shadowed him to one of his haunts for Dick, and the moment I saw him capture you I said—'Here's work for you, Gid!' They didn't know I was riding between the wheels of the cab when they were rushing you through the city."

"We shall ever be friends," exclaimed the boy spotter, slapping his deliverer on the shoulder. "Where did they carry me?"

"To Simon's new haunt on Mulberry street. He chose it after the Bleeker street trap went up. Do you know, Phil, that we are going to get rid of a part of the gang day after tomorrow?"

"The Eudocia does not sail then?"

"No, but the Wyoming does," exclaimed Gid. "Mr. Stephen Slack and his sister have taken passage in her."

"I see—in other words, Felix and the city Cleopatra!" cried Phil. "I will see about that!" Some distance from the scene of the young spotter's unexpected rescue the two boys separated.

Phil again acknowledged the debt he owed Gid Gobright and the little fellow said that it need never be paid.

"Now I go to work," exclaimed Phil. "In the first place, I shall surprise Doctor Lapins. The hour is not very late and I have got a good deal of information out of Gid. Out of the trap without a scratch, thanks to my friend Dick's new shadower. I am still Phil Flash, the young fox of Gotham!"

Not long afterward and that same night Doctor Lapins was surprised at his office by Phil who said with a laugh:

"I'll take that finger, doctor. Come! now don't go back on your promise. I was to give you a day's notice, I know, but I must have it now. Can you produce it this very night?"

The astonished doctor threw himself back in his chair and stared at the boy.

"Do you mean what you say?" he asked.

"Every word of it," was the reply.

The doctor picked up his hat.

"You shall have it," he said. "Wait for me here."

"All right, doctor."

For a little more than twenty minutes the youth was the sole occupant of the doctor's office, then a step was heard and the city physician reappeared.

"I guess this answers the demand," he said smiling as he laid on the desk before Phil something wrapped in white paper. "Look at it for yourself, Phil."

The boy undid the paper and disclosed a human finger which had been lately amputated.

It was slender and well-shaped, and the boy uttered a cry as he looked.

"It looks like a finger from Viota Estrange's hand!" he exclaimed looking up into the doctor's face. "This will make somebody jump out of his boots."

The doctor looked on but made no reply, and Philip wrapped the finger up again and deposited it carefully in his pocket.

"Shall I hear a report from you?" asked the physician as Phil turned to leave.

"I shouldn't be surprised," laughed the young detective and the next moment he was gone.

"You and I for the honor of winning the game, Dick Derringer!" he said as he hurried down the street. "I am going to play my best hand before morning if the stakes are not raked in by somebody else before that. We shall see who comes out best, Simon!"

Half an hour later Phil Flash appeared at the house occupied by Cleo. He no longer resembled himself and seemed confident that the keen eyes of the city Cleopatra would not penetrate his disguise.

The interview between Felix and the woman had come to an end and the boy's ring was responded to by the woman in person.

"I come from Simon," explained the boy; upon which he was admitted into the house where the gas was suddenly turned on, and he found himself face to face with the woman he had floored with a chair in the Bleeker street trap.

"Well, what does Simon want?" asked the eager woman.

The boy threw off the mask to a certain extent, for he dived into his pocket and brought up the finger.

"Look here, Cleo," he went on, suddenly displaying the finger from which the beautiful accomplice started with a look of horror. "I guess you know who owned that finger once. You know that Simon threw it into the river, a few nights ago, from the ferry-boat! Ha! I see that he has told you. Simon is in the hands of the police. He has confessed!"

For a moment the woman seemed about to sink senseless at Phil's feet, but all at once she sprung forward and glared into his face like a tigress.

"Confessed, has he?" she exclaimed. "I hope the rope of vengeance will lengthen his infamous neck. Know that finger? Of course I do! It was taken from the hand of Viota Estrange, for whose money we have played. Why don't you go and get the ring from Felix and put it back on that finger?"

"So he has the ring?"

"He has it. I hate them both; they have dragged me step by step into this terrible thing, but I had nerved myself to play the gold game out. I will do it, too. Felix was here a little while ago. If he did not take a cab I doubt whether he has reached his new haunt. You will find him, as Simon has told in his confession, of course, at No. — Canal street. You are the boy we had in our clutches in Bleeker street. I see it now!"

Phil smiled and slightly bent his head.

"It's a pity we didn't choke you when we had the chance," the woman went on. "But, never mind! One of these days your throat will catch it!"

The young detective laughed and drew back.

"This house is watched by the police," he announced. "If you attempt to escape you will be arrested."

He left the woman, with blazing eyes, in the center of the room, and when he reached the sidewalk he muttered:

"Now for Felix and Simon! I have yet to deal with the worst tigers in the jungle."

CHAPTER XV.

THE TIGER'S TEETH.

FELIX had the ring and the papers, and the boy detective concluded that he wanted them first before he tackled Simon.

This time he had nobody to dog his footsteps when he left the city Cleopatra, and he was anxious to confront this shrewd accomplice whom he had first seen in Jersey City the night he shadowed Simon across the ferry.

After Felix, Simon; that was the boy's plan, and he hoped to play his cards fast.

It was not a long distance from Cleo's house to the place on Canal street, supposed to be inhabited by Felix, the custodian of the proofs of heirship and guilt.

At a certain corner Phil stepped into a cab, where he found two men already seated, and the vehicle rattled off as the door closed.

"Well, how did you succeed?" asked one of the men of Phil.

"First rate. She believes that Simon has confessed. I think the tigress's claws have been clipped. At any rate, she will keep to the house."

"And Simon—if he should come?"

"He will be taken in by Smedley, who is on hand on the outside for a double purpose," was the answer. "If the woman comes out she will be stopped; but have no fear, gentlemen—we will find her there when we go back."

The cab continued to move on until it turned into Canal street, when at a certain place the boy spotter gave the order to stop.

All three got out and walked away, leaving the driver on his box as if he would be wanted before long for another drive. In front of a rather large two-story frame house the three halted and the men stationed themselves beside the door.

"Isn't it just a bit risky?" whispered one of them to the boy detective as he went up the steps.

"What if it is?" was the reply.

"Remember that I am used to risky games and I am playing this one for some one else as well as for myself."

"Then sail in, but be careful of the tiger's teeth inside."

It was about eleven o'clock when Phil Flash rung the bell whose silvery notes awoke the echoes of a hall beyond the door. In one of the upper windows of the house was a faint light, and when the bell rung it changed suddenly to another room.

After a lapse of two minutes the door was unlocked from the inside, and a small girl with a sleepy look greeted the boy.

She seemed to take detective Phil for a boarder who had been locked out, for she held the door open without a word, and the boy glided inside.

"I have a message for the man with the sandy mustache and the scar on his left cheek," he said, believing that in his new hiding-place, Felix had changed his name.

The girl pointed up the flight of steps, and said:

"The first room to the right. You will find him up, I think. He was awake awhile ago."

Phil immediately began to climb the stairs, and as the girl disappeared he slipped off his shoes and went on.

He recalled the time he invaded Felix's lodgings in Jersey City, when he picked the desk and found a lot of papers which he thought were Genia's stolen title-claims. He remembered the babe he had seen in Felix's bed, and wondered whether the accomplice had brought the child to his New York quarters.

In the Jersey City house he had avoided Felix, but he had come thither especially to find him, to confront him with an accusation which might transform him into a tiger.

He kept on up the stairs, and without difficulty found the room to the right, designated by the little janitress as Felix's apartments.

To Phil's surprise the door stood slightly ajar, and he could see a light in the room beyond.

"Forward, Phil Flash!" he said to himself. "The first play has been successful. Make the next equally so."

A moment later he had pushed the door open, and was looking into the room. It was not difficult to see that the apartment had an occupant, for a man was seated at a table with his back toward the door.

"Felix, my man!" mentally ejaculated the boy.

On the table before the man lay a lot of papers which he was consulting, and the boy saw at a glance that some of them were documents that had passed through the courts.

He looked for a moment at the broad shoulders of the man at the table, and then stepped forward. The next instant he could have touched the man.

"Felix!"

At sound of the voice the man whirled, looked once into the boy's face, and sprung up. As he confronted Phil his own face came into the light, and the young spotter saw that he was a smooth-faced man who did not much resemble Felix, the murderer's accomplice.

But he was Felix, all the same; for when he caught the triumphant light in the boy's eyes, he started back and thrust one hand under a pile of papers on the table.

"Not that!" said the boy spotter, whose eye had followed him, and at the same time the startled Felix looked over the barrel of a six-shooter that grinned in his face. "If you lift the revolver you clutch, Felix, I will send a bullet through your head! Don't be a fool, now. I have just come from Cleo, and I have the pleasure of informing you that the game is up. I am here for the ring and the papers. I have the missing finger—see!"

While he spoke the boy spotter drew forth the little object that had blanched Cleo's cheeks, and held it toward Felix, alongside the revolver that covered him.

"Behold the mute witness of your crime," he went on. "This is the finger wanted by the dead woman's hand found on Mott street."

"Then Simon lied!" cried Felix. "He said he threw it into the river."

"Even the river gives up its dead sometimes," laughed the boy. "Come, Felix. Show me the papers. Genia's stolen title claims and all. Place them on the table, there, and beside them the ring. Simon has five buttons on his coat again. The fifth one has been missing for some days, but his visit by night to Custer Sharpe's lodgings secured it. And besides you will see Simon in a short time."

"Is he in hoc?" asked Felix.

"I say you shall see him," was the reply. "Come, be quick! I want to see the ring and the papers."

Felix had already taken his hand from beneath the pile of papers, but he was not eager to comply with the boy's request.

"What! give all up to this boy and then go bound to Simon with the big game a failure?" he muttered. "I have gone into this thing too deeply to submit without a fight. This boy is here alone; he must be met here and baffled."

Phil Flash did not see the resolution that settled over the face of the desperate man he had run down when he began to gather up the papers that covered the table.

"It's a long term in Sing Sing if not death, so why not make a last bold play?" growled Felix.

The following moment the table was overturned by a dextrous movement of the villain's hand, and in an instant the powerful figure of Felix came toward the boy spotter like a cannon ball!

Phil lowered the revolver for the purpose of carrying out his threat; but a sallow hand with a grip of steel clutched his arm, and it seemed that his minute of victory had vanished forever!

The boy went backward in the rascal's grip and a minute later the two were on the floor struggling for the mastery. Phil was wiry and very strong for his years, and threatened to give Felix a good deal of trouble when that scoundrel suddenly got his hand on the boy's throat.

The fingers tightened suddenly like a vise, and in a moment the room darkened before the boy's eyes.

"When you meet Felix you rouse a tiger," laughed the accomplice. "My cards were worth playing after all. We will see who rakes in the English fortune in the long run, my boy."

One of Phil's hands had found its way under Felix's collar and he could not tear it loose. He got up and tugged at the wrist with all his strength.

"By the eternal, I'll cut it loose!" he hissed.

In a moment he held a knife in his hand, and the shining blade was about to descend upon the boy's wrist, when a stern "Stop, there!" was heard, and Felix saw two men in the doorway with leveled revolvers!

"Cornered!" growled Simon's right bower, giving look for look.

"Cornered for Sing Sing or the gallows, I hope," was the quick retort. "Take the boy loose, Morgan. If the rascal objects, we'll save the expenses of a trial!"

Felix did not object, and a few minutes later a boy and three men went from the house, and entered a cab that stood on the street below.

"Do you feel strong enough to attempt to corner Simon to-night?" asked one of the detectives of Phil Flash, when Felix had been left to himself behind the bars of a station.

"I shall try him right away," was the response. "He is the most important man."

The young detective was about to leave the station to confront the man with the marked hand when a boy rushed up and accosted him.

"Gid!" exclaimed Phil. "Gentlemen, this is the friend who got me out of Simon's last dungeon."

"He will never get you into another, Phil," cried Gid, seizing the young spotter's arm. "I have news for you. Simon Sampson has decamped."

Phil Flash uttered an exclamation.

"He left Dick Derringer behind, dead!" finished the boy.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEARLY RUN DOWN.

IN a little room on Mulberry street lay a man whose face was ghastly in the gaslight. He lay perfectly quiet, and not a sound broke the silence that reigned around him.

This man, as the reader already suspects, was Dick Derringer, the Broadway detective, and the man who first took up the trail of the Mott street mystery.

We have seen him at intervals in the course of our story, and always at work; we know that he had seen Simon purchase the steamship tickets, and that, through Gid Gobreight, he had ferreted out Cleo and Felix. He had yet to find Simon's new haunt, and find it he did.

Simon Sampson was visited by a man who bore no resemblance to the Broadway spotter. It was between the time of Phil's escape, with

Gid's assistance, and the boy spotter's tussle with Felix in that villain's hiding-place.

Simon had not discovered Phil's absence and he was gloating over the successful abduction when he found himself confronted by the disguised detective.

We need not weary the reader with the details of Dick's hunt for Simon; we need only say that Gid had assisted the hunt and that at last the detective found himself behind the plotter's threshold.

Simon could not think who would visit him besides Felix, but this man was not Felix. He had eyes totally unlike the cold orbs of his accomplice.

For several seconds the two men stood face to face eying one another in a strange manner, then Derringer stepped forward and threw off the mask.

"I've found you at last, Simon," he said. "It has been a long trail and rather tortuous, but I am at the end. You are wanted for the murder of the woman called Viola Estrange, though that, as you know, was not her true name."

"And you—"

"I am Richard Derringer—the man to whom you sent the boastful challenge by the boy, Phil Flash. He saw your marked hand that night, and that has been one of my clues. Hold that hand up in the gaslight, Simon, and the scar can be seen. Aha! you played surgeon well and poisoner, too; but all to no purpose in the end. The law wants you, Simon Sampson. The blood of the Englishwoman, driven to America by the persecutions of a brutal husband, demands vengeance."

Simon Sampson seemed to increase several inches in stature. He drew back like a tiger ready for a leap; his look gave him away.

"So you want me?" he said in a desperate voice.

"I do."

"You—Richard Derringer?"

"Yes."

"Very well! Here I am!"

With the last word came a bound much like the one executed by Felix when the boy spotter faced him, and despite detective Derringer's agility, he was taken half unawares and went backward under the mad assault.

Simon Sampson seemed a devil incarnate for he suddenly whipped out a revolver and delivered two blows in terrible succession. All this in the space of a second as it seemed. He did not give the detective a chance to defend himself; he had transformed himself into a tiger in the twinkling of an eye.

When he released Dick he sunk to the floor, and Simon glared at him with the triumphant look of a fiend.

"Hunted me down, eh?" he ejaculated. "I should say that one of your trails has failed, Dick Derringer. I guess we will play this game out after all, and rake in the English fortune. I'll go on while I have my hand in, and attend to the young fox in the cellar. No more man-hunting from you, Richard. Found a tiger instead of Simon Sampson, hey? I should say so!"

Simon left the room, and went down a few steps from another part of the house. At the foot of the stairs he unlocked a door, and stepped into a dark, dungeon-like place.

All was silent.

After awhile he struck a match, and held it over his head. Suddenly he uttered a strange cry.

"Where is the box?" he exclaimed. "I am sure there are no holes in this place. He is gone!"

Simon sprung to the door that opened upon the alley, but it was locked. His match went out, and he struck another.

"Why didn't we strangle him in the cab?" he cried. "Felix wanted to do it, but I thought this place was safe. Confound the luck. I wish I had let Felix have his way!"

Simon's little prisoner had indeed escaped, and there was no use mourning over the matter. After awhile the villain went back to the room where he had left the unfortunate detective.

"Well, I brought down one of the hounds anyway," he said to himself. "Good-by, Richard Derringer. They may not find you here for a week."

He left the house with the air of a man who did not intend to return. He forgot to turn down the gas, and its mellow light fell upon the motionless figure and the marble-like face of the Broadway spotter.

Simon had been gone half an hour when a boy entered that room in his stocking feet. He drew back when he saw the detective lying on the

floor, but the retreat was only momentary. When he went forward and looked into Dick's face, he sprung toward the door.

"This is Simon's work. He must have taken Richard unawares. The Broadway spotter found the man with the marked hand and got his everlasting, too."

The boy went out and by-and-by two policemen entered the house. Gid Gobreight had informed the authorities of the terrible discovery he had made.

As for Simon Sampson, he seemed bewildered when he found himself once more in the street. He did not know where to go nor what to do for several minutes.

All at once he started off at a rapid gait and did not stop until he was in a certain quarter of the city seldom visited by him.

"I'll see Cleo once more to-night," he murmured, but he soon drew back from a certain house, for it seemed to be guarded by two men, into whose clutches he came near falling.

"Heavens! what has happened?" he exclaimed. "Cleo is watched by two men. Is this the end of the game? Felix will tell me."

Definitely avoiding the detectives whom the boy spotter had set to watch Cleo's house, the head villain started off again. This time he found a cab on the street and gave the driver certain directions in a low voice. He was driven rapidly away.

A short time afterward he alighted on a certain corner and hurried toward a house, to the front door of which he seemed to possess a night-key.

Eager to find Felix, Simon hurried up-stairs and burst into his accomplice's room.

"They have been here, too!" fell from his lips as he stopped suddenly just beyond the threshold and felt all color fade from his cheeks.

He saw the overturned table and the chair broken in the struggle between detective Phil and Felix, but not a sign of the valuable papers could Simon discover. He searched every part of the room, and then turned away with a bitter curse of disappointment.

"Cleo guarded and Felix gone! It begins to look as if I have to fight it out myself," he said. "It is the work of the boy—the young fox who has twice escaped from my trap. Well, I can play another hand and I will. They will never run this city wolf down. I have something here that will baffle them all at last!" and he struck his breast triumphantly as he finished.

Once more on the street Simon looked like a different man.

"I'd give half the fortune for a sight of that boy!" he hissed as he shut his sallow hands. "In the first place, I was foolish for sending the challenge to Dick Derringer, but I was certain I had made the Mott street mystery insoluble, and I always hated the Broadway spotter. If Felix is not in their hands, he will wait for me till twelve at Mike's. I will go down and see."

Look behind you, Simon Sampson, before you get to Mike's for the keenest pair of young eyes in Gotham are destined to run you down.

But Simon did not look back and about half-past eleven he entered a saloon and passed into the private room where he seated himself at a table.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ACCUSING FINGER.

MR. SIMON SAMPSON did not find Felix in the drinking-room when he entered. He saw several men whom he did not know, and none of them took the least notice of him.

Simon ordered a bottle of beer and proceeded to enjoy it by himself. Felix might come yet, and every man who dropped into the place was closely scrutinized by the schemer as he took his seat at one of the tables.

In the middle of his second bottle, Simon was interrupted by the waiter who delivered a small packet with the remark that it had just been left for him.

"For—me?" stammered Simon. "This is a mistake. I—"

"Isn't your name Simon Sampson?"

"Yes, but—"

"It is for you, then," and the waiter withdrew.

Curiously inclined, Simon began to unwrap the package. The light of a gas-jet fell upon him, and he soon saw nothing but the little packet in his hands.

At last he reached the last paper that inclosed it, then he quickly tore it open and almost bounded from his seat.

Before him lay a human finger encircled by a gold ring with a singular setting!

The ghastly object nearly fell from Simon's grasp. He started back and glanced toward the door leading into the bar.

"At last, Simon Sampson!" said a voice at this moment. "I have run down the last of the three. The river has given up the finger you threw from the ferry-boat a few nights ago, and Felix has surrendered the ring which was to do such wonders across the sea. Your traps don't hold a person very long. I see you have got five buttons on your coat again, thanks to your visit to Custer Sharpe's lodgings with the forged letter. The lower button will show that it has been sewed on lately, and Custer Sharpe will tell his story at the right time. What do you think of the game now, Simon of the marked hand?"

There was no answer.

The entrapped villain was glaring at Phil Flash over the revolver which the boy was holding out with a steady hand. Behind the young detective stood two stalwart men, who looked like officers of the law, and Simon saw that he had been hunted down.

"I ran across you accidentally on your way here," continued Phil. "You left Dick Derringer dead in your Mulberry street house, I understand. Did you administer to him the same subtle poison that took Viola Estrange's life?"

Still there was no reply, but the next moment the dead finger dropped to the table, and Simon's hand disappeared into one of his vest-pockets.

As it came out, something fell from it into the glass of beer he was about to lift to his lips when the waiter brought the packet.

The next second he carried the glass to his mouth, but it had barely touched his lips when the room resounded with the report of a revolver, and the glass was shattered into fragments.

"Not yet, Simon!" cried Detective Phil. "The law wants you first!"

A moment later the two men at the boy's back sprung forward, and one of the most detestable villains in New York was struggling in their grasp.

"If I had let Felix have his own way, this would not have happened!" grated Simon, glaring at Phil.

"The next time take Felix's advice," was the laughing rejoinder.

It is not our intention to follow Simon, step by step, to the end of his dark career, for we have reached the end of our story.

The city was surprised to get the solution of what was known as "the Mott street mystery," and the surprise increased when it was known that a boy had run the rascals down.

The papers stolen from Genia Hale, the working girl, and found in Felix's possession, established her claim to the English fortune, and proved that she was the lost child of the woman called Viola Estrange, murdered by Simon Sampson for the ring she wore.

Felix, who did not sail in the Wyoming with his false sister, made a full confession, hoping thereby to escape the rigor of the law; but he was sent to Sing Sing for a long term.

The papers taken from his desk by Phil, the night he visited the house in Jersey City, proved to be valuable, and established a clew to the little child in the rascal's possession. They helped to open the prison doors to Felix, and added several years to his sentence.

Cleo, the city Cleopatra, never came to trial, for she took her own life, and died lamenting that she had ever met the two men who had made her their tool.

The reader may be sure that Simon Sampson did not escape. He got the full sentence of the law, and the thousands who read one day in their afternoon papers that the wretch was no more, felt that justice had triumphed.

By the merest chance Richard Derringer did not die of his wounds, but recovered, and is still following the hazardous profession of city detective. He never scolded his young assistant for beating him at his greatest case, and Phil often drops in upon him and enjoys a pleasant chat.

Gid Gobright is Dick's boy shadower now, and he bids fair to equal Phil with the proper experience.

Custer Sharpe recovered health and reason, and when he heard that the bad gang had been run down by the boy—his rival for Genia's affections—he knew that his little schemes had been blasted.

He has since transferred his quarters to another city, where he is looking for a girl with title papers; but he never forgets his night in the Blecker street cellar.

Phil Flash is no longer a human shadower. He has left that business to devote his time to looking after pretty Genia Hale and her ample fortune, and ere long there will be a certain quiet and very pleasant wedding in Gotham.

Doctor Lapins has never told Phil that the finger he procured for him was actually from the hand of Simon Sampson's victim, which hand had been preserved by one of the doctors who examined the corpse.

It was a deep, cool game that Simon and his two partners played, but they found themselves outwitted by a boy who could play a hand as cool as theirs—Phil Flash, the boy detective of New York.

THE END.

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